6. The Nature of Jiang's Music and Musical Creativity

Indeed, it is such scrutiny that leads to the second disjuncture in biographical understanding of Jiang Kui, one that concerns his musical development and involvement with professional musicians, especially female ones. Xia Chengtao (1900-86), the noted literary historian who built the factual basis for modern Jiang Kui studies, has exposed a youthful and secret romance between the artist and two singsong girls, Daqiao and Xiaoqiao of Hefei, building a most convincing case that his longing for the girls explains many cryptic phrases in his poetry (Xia 1963:269-82). As data for the romance is scarce, and as the artist's love life is not considered to be a central element in understanding his artistry, the romance is often glossed over as merely a clue for interpreting some of his poems. Chinese biographers do not delve into the love lives of their biographees because they do not want to risk appearing as voyeurs and violate the Chinese convention that biographies of Chinese heroes are always sanitized: only the indulgences of the "bad guys" are exposed and used as evidence of their immoral personalities and delinquent lives. Jiang Kui is a "good guy," an artist who was amorous (*fengliu*) but not licentious (*huangyin*).

Submitting to Chinese convention, and glossing over Jiang Kui's involvement with female musicians may, however, ignore a potentially significant window to his musical world. If the romance with the singsong girls happened during the decade of 1176-86 when little of the artist's activities were known (or have been suppressed?), then it began the year he composed "Yangzhou Man," his earliest datable musical-poetic composition, and a universally admired masterpiece. If Jiang Kui was already a skillful poet-composer in 1176 when he was only 22 years old, one has to ask how he had learned to write such sophisticated poetry and music? Growing up as the son of a scholar-official, the artist had plenty of education and opportunity to learn to become a poet, and thus his precocious mastery of literary skill poses no questions. However, how he learned to compose *ci* tunes and record them with music notation is a different matter; such skills were uncommon among literati of the time.

Did he learn or at least develop his *ci* music composition and notation skills with the singsong girls he now socialized with? It is apparent that Jiang Kui cannot have developed his secular *ci* music skills by reading Confucian classics and practicing the seven-string zither. Those documents and music activities would only help develop his knowledge of Confucian music theories and practices that promote proper music and suppress secular music. In fact, judging from the scarcity of technical discussion about *ci* music in literary and musical sources from the Song dynasties, scholar-officials of the time could not be the artist's primary or sole music teachers. As described in most historical documents, male literati composed poetic texts according to preexistent and labeled *ci* tunes (*qupai*), while professional entertainment musicians, many of whom were female, realized and performed the actual tunes.[10] Only a few of the male literati are known to have actively participated in the composing, realizing, performing, and notating of *ci* music. In fact, Jiang Kui is the only Southern Song poet who is verifiably known to have regularly composed and performed *ci* tunes and used vernacular notation to record his own music. Other Song dynasty scholar-officials, such as Su Shi (1037-1101), Zhou Bangyan (1056-1121) and Liu Yong (died *c.*1053) were known to be musical gifted and active, but they left only *ci* song texts and no notated melodies of their own.

Thus, even if Jiang Kui initially learned *ci* music and music notation from fellow scholar-officials, he developed his skills among singsong girls and other professional musicians. This is clearly suggested by the artist's own description of his music activities, especially those with female musicians. As a young adult, the artist made music with the Hefei sisters; he described that Daqiao, the elder of the two singsong girls, could play the *pipa* like a spring breeze while Xiaoqiao, the younger sister, was skilled at performing the *zheng* zither (Xia 1959:119). In 1191, Jiang Kui composed "Guo chuihong" (Passing the Drooping-Rainbow Bridge): in translation, its text reads:

> The song I newly made, its resonance most lovely,
> Xiaohong quietly sings, and I play the flute.
> The tune ends, we've passed all the pine-covered hills,
> Looking back: amid mists and waves, fourteen bridges (trans. Lin 1978:53)

Xiaohong was a maid or family courtesan noted for her beauty and musical talents: her involvement with the artist is clearly recorded (Huang 1972:37). In the winter of 1191, the artist visited Fan Chengda in the latter's retreat in Suzhou, and stayed there for a month. One day during the visit, Fan gave Jiang Kui a piece of paper and requested new songs. Thus, the artist composed the lyrics and tunes of "Anxiang" and "Shuying." Fan loved the graceful melodies and clear rhythm of the songs, and ordered two family courtesans to practice and perform them. On New Year's Eve, the artist left for his home in Wuqing, and Fan presented him with Xiaohong, who obviously was one of the two family courtesans. That evening, as the artist's boat floated towards home, heavy snow fell, and he composed "Passing the Drooping-Rainbow Bridge," depicting a vivid picture of his making music with his female companion.

In the preface to his *ci* song "Changtingyuan man," Jiang Kui noted that he liked to create *ci* songs, and explained his creative process: first he would improvise the short and long textual phrases of the lyrics, and then he would set the lyrics to his newly created tunes—this is why those melodies would vary among the stanzas (Xia 1959:125). What the artist did not say explicitly but is clearly implied is that he would practice and perform the newly composed texts and tunes of his with singsong girls or female family courtesans. In other words, he developed his *ci* music through active performance with female musicians.

A musical reading of "Passing the Drooping Rainbow Bridge" would clarify this musical development. If Jiang Kui could play the vertical flute (*xiao*) to accompany Xiaohong's singing of his new lyrics during a boat ride on a winter's night, it is reasonable to presume that they did not play from a meticulously prepared urtext of a musical score—in traditional China, music scores are more an aid than a necessity in music making. In other words, the artist and Xiaohong either sang and played from memory or improvised together. This was possible because they shared a common musical language, one that was more practiced by singsong girls and professional musicians than scholar-officials. And both were familiar with the materials and conventions of composing-improvising-performing *ci* music. As a matter of fact, shared melodic materials appear in a number of the artist's tunes (Pian 1967:36-37).

That Jiang Kui was a *xiao* performer also helps explain his notational skill, one that is uncommon among his literati contemporaries. The popular notation the artist used was developed from tablatures of some wind instruments—symbols that originally refer to the fingerholes that wind players cover with their fingers to produce specific tones when air is blown into the instrument. Perhaps to facilitate the learning or memorization of tunes, the wind players occasionally notated the music with references to the fingerholes. They did not need to notate all of their music: as professional musicians, they could quickly memorize the tunes or know how to create tunes anew. Even Jiang Kui did not notate the tunes for all his *ci* songs.

As much as Jiang Kui performed and notated his own *ci* music, he did not entertain paying audiences, a service that was only expected from female courtesans and professional musicians. The artist thus remained a musical literatus. Such a role is affirmed by his intellectual and practical interest in historical music, a musical and research activity that many Song dynasty scholar-officials shared. The artist was, nevertheless, different from his fellow scholar-theorists; he showed no hesitation to cross social boundaries and learn from the lower-class professional musicians. In the preface to "Qiliangfan" (Desolation), the artist reported that he asked Tian Zhengde, a court musician, to test his new compositions (Xia 1959:133). In the preface to the "Nichang zhongxu diyi" (Rainbow Skirt: Middle Prelude, First Section) he described how he discovered old music from musicians at a local temple; he meticulously explained his discovery, use, and scholarly interpretation of the historical music:

> In the year of 1186, I stayed in Changsha, and climbed Mount Zhurong. There I got two pieces of music offered to the mountain deity, namely the "Huangdiyan" and "Suhexiang." I also found, from the musicians' old manuscripts, eighteen music stanzas of the "Nichang qu in the shuang mode", all of which have instrumental notation but no lyrics. According to Shen Gua's [1031-95] theoretical discussion of "Nichang daodiao", the [Tang dynasty] composition should be in the *dao* mode; the one [I found] is in the *shuang* mode. A poem of Bai Juyi [the great Tang dynasty poet, 772-846] states that the free preludes of the piece include six stanzas; the one [I found] has only two. I do not know who is correct. Anyway, the melody and the rhythm of [the discovered music] is leisurely and elegant, and is different from contemporary tunes. I have not had time to compose [lyrics for] all [the stanzas of the found music]; I have only written for the first stanza of the middle prelude to preserve it for the future. Right now I am a traveler and I am touched by these ancient tunes; without knowing it, I [feel] the sorrow and repressed [feelings] they convey (Xia 1959:107).

The preface of "Zuiyin shang xiaopin" (A small *pin* song on the tune "Drunken Singing" in the *shuang* mode) of 1191 reported a similar encounter with and acquisition of historical music, attesting to Jiang Kui's scholarly pursuit of historical music, and explaining why his *ci* music is probably unique and transcends that of singsong girls. In translation, the preface says:

> Old Master Fan Chengda once told me that there are four *pipa* pieces that are now lost; they are: "Huoshuo," "Liangzhou zhuanguan lüyao," "Zuiyin shang hu weizhou," and "Lixian bomei." I always think about them. In the summer of 1191, I visited Master Yang Tingxiu in Nanjing. In his mansion, I met a *pipa* player who performed a piece that he called "Zuiyin shang hu weizhou." I requested [from him] tablatures for [finding] the frets on which to stop and pluck the strings, and transcribed this score. The piece is really in the mode of *shangsheng* (Xia 1959:100).

7. Concluding Remarks: Music Biographies for Jiang Kui and Other Historical East Asian Musicians

Jiang Kui was a unique musician, and it is fortunate that he wrote detailed prefaces to a number of his poems and music, providing insights about himself, his works, and his musical life. There is little doubt that he wanted to be known as a distinctive individual: he wrote autobiographical prefaces and notes to explain and promote himself and his poetry. As argued by Shuen-fu Lin, the artist has used the prefaces to "create a separate artistic entity within the larger totality of the preface-cum-song": the prefaces not only indicate the origin and content of the songs but also give "a realistic context or a frame of realistic reference" to understand what the song is "intended to mean" (Lin 1978:65-66).

The prefaces also particularized and authenticated Jiang Kui's individual existence and artistry. He is proud of his own artistic achievements but also sensitive of his failures in practical matters. Perceiving himself as an orphan who had neither the nurturing of a father nor the support of a powerful clan—many successful scholar-officials of the Song times had such social support—he probably felt insecure. Thus he searched for patrons who would substitute for the missing father and elder brothers. And he had his share of personal regrets. Given such circumstances, it was expedient for him to present himself, in his mature years, as a wandering and destitute artist. He could hardly afford to stress the idealistic and vigorous aspect of his life, one that nevertheless shines through in poems like "Manjianghong" and "Yongyule" (1204). It is unfortunate that not much of Jiang's life after 1207 is clear—no surviving materials of the artist can be dated after that year. For reasons yet to be examined, his autobiographical voice stopped.

Jiang Kui lived in a tumultuous time. After the Jurchens, a minority people of China, destroyed the Northern Song court in 1126, ransacked the capital of Kaifeng, and took, as captives, two Song emperors to the north, the hastily organized Southern Song court and society had to recover from the shame of defeat, fend off further military threats from the north, and rebuild the Han Chinese world and economy.[11] It was a unique time in Chinese history and culture, and that is why Jiang Kui's fascinating life in the Southern Song needs to be told. It is a story that will enhance musi-