

The Master of Cifu Poetry and His Faithful Love: Xiang-ru Si-ma in Poems

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Abstract: From story “Playing Qin to Flirt Wen-jun” in Records of the Historian and History of the Han Dynasty, to the Two Qin Songs and Feng Qiu Huang in legendary music score, the romantic love story between Xiang-ru Si-ma and Wen-jun Zhuo was widely extolled by later scholars through various literary forms, such as poetry, lyrics, even dramas and novels. Xiang-ru Si-ma’s achievements in Cifu were also highly praised. Xie Liu, Shi-zhen Wang and other scholars praised him as the “Master of Cifu”. Xiang-ru Si-ma was one of the representatives of Cifu poetry in Han Dynasty. Literary men of later dynasties also extolled the “Master of Cifu” in various literary styles. Therefore, the study of his influence on later generations could be carried out from a variety of literary genres. Taking the perspective of the literary form of poetry, this paper analyzes Xiang-ru Si-ma, who is regarded as the “Master of Cifu” “Faithful to Love” in the related poems.

1. Introduction

Xiang-ru Si-ma’s love story with Wen-jun Zhuo was widely spread in later poetry; he was also known as the man “faithful to love”. Xiang-ru was also a famous writer in the Western Han Dynasty, and one of the representative writers of Cifu poetry in Han dynasty. He was called as the “Master of Cifu” by Gu Ban and Xie Liu. Xiang-ru Si-ma’s romantic love story and elegant poems have always been the creation objects for poets of all dynasties. This paper intends to analyze the role of Xiang-ru Si-ma as the “Master of Cifu” “Faithful to Love” in poems.

2. The Romantic Legend of Faithful Love: Qin Song, Feng Qiu Huang and Quintai Poems

The love story of Xiang-ru Si-ma and Wen-jun Zhuo originated from the record of “Playing Qin to Flirt Wen-jun” (Qin is a plucked instrument in ancient China), which first appeared in the Biography of Xiang-ru Si-ma in Records of the Historian. “At this time, Wang-Sun Zhuo, a rich merchant, had a daughter named Wen-jun, whose husband died lately. Wen-jun liked music very much, so Xiang-ru pretended to respect with the county magistrate, and secretly induced her with the sound of Qin. When Xiang-ru came to Linqiong, the carriages and horses followed behind. He behaved elegantly, quietly and generously. When he came to the Wang-Sun Zhuo’s house to drink and play Qin, Wen-jun peeked at him from the crack between the door and its frame. He was very happy and liked her very much, but he was afraid that she would not understand his feeling. When the banquet was over, Wen-jun’s waiter was given a heavy reward to convey his admiration. So, Wen-jun Zhuo fled home at night and eloped with Xiang-ru. Xiang-ru rushed back to Chengdu with Wenjun.”^[1] This romantic story in Records of the Historian evolved into relevant records in Biography of Xiang-ru Si-ma in History of the Han Dynasty, but Qian Si-ma and Gu Ban did not mention the notes or lyrics of the song.

In the Jin Dynasty, Hong Ge’s Miscellaneous Records of Xijing recorded the lyrics of Qin Songs. In Chen of the Southern Dynasty, Ling Xu’s New Songs from the Jade Terrace recorded two pieces of “Qin Songs”.

Phoenix bird ah Phoenix bird, returned to his hometown, whereabouts are uncertain, only to visit the world in search of Phoenix bird in his heart.

The lack of opportunities at this time resulted in my little success. When the right opportunity has come, I can fly into the sky and rank as a courtier.

There is a beautiful, elegant and quiet woman in her living room, although near, I cannot reach

this beauty. Missing, is crushing my heart.

How can I get this good bond, marry a couple, and be that loving cross-necked Mandarin duck?

Phoenix bird ah Phoenix bird, wish you and I live together, inseparable, nurture children and always be my spouse.

There is affection, agreement and harmony between the two hearts. Who knows if we follow each other in the middle of the night?

Spread your wings and fly away. In vain, I feel sorrow for missing you.^[2]

In the fourth compromise of the second edition of Shi-fu Wang's Zaju (poetic drama set to music), Romance of the Western Chamber in the Yuan Dynasty, Ying-ying Cui Listened to the Playing of Qin at Night, the author mentions Xiang-ru Si-ma's Qin Song, Feng Qiu Huang. (In Chinese, Feng means the male phoenix, while Huang means the female phoenix. Qiu means court.)

There is a beautiful woman. I can't forget her appearance.

One day without her, I feel like I'm going crazy.

I am like the phoenix flying high in the air, looking for Phoenix birds everywhere in the sky.

Unfortunately, the beauty is not near the East Wall.

I use the sound of Qin to represent emotional words, describe the feelings in my heart.

When can you agree to marry me and comfort my wandering back and forth?

I hope my virtue can match with you, and I can join hands with you.

I don't know what to do, if I can't keep up with you for the rest of my life.

I will fall into sadness and want to die.

For the love story "Playing Qin to Flirt Wen-jun" in Records of the Historian as well as the History of the Han Dynasty, to the two Qin Songs in New Songs from the Jade Terrace and Feng Qiu Huang in the Romance of the Western Chamber, we can clearly see that the love story of Xiang-ru and Wen-jun is constantly enriched in its development. Although scholars generally believe that Qin Songs and Feng Qiu Huang were created by scholars of later generation, there is no doubt that these poems and their similar works depict Xiang-ru Si-ma's romantic image and enrich the connotation of the thousand-year-old love myth. From the poetry forms of Qin Songs and Feng Qiu Huang, Feng Qiu Huang in the Romance of the Western Chamber maintains the simple style of four-character Chu Ci poetry. On the contrary, the two Qin Songs, which appeared earlier, broke through the main form of Li Sao (the most reprehensive work of the Chu Ci poetry) style, and were more similar to seven-character poetry. By Tang Dynasty, poet Hu Zhang's composed the Qin Song of Xiang-ru Si-ma, which made the images of Xiang-ru and Wen-jun more brilliant, and brought more moral connotation to this love story.

Phoenix, Phoenix, you can find a mate nearby. But in order to find the Phoenix in your mind, you flew over mountains and rivers, and travelled immeasurable distance.

Phoenix only rest on Chinese parasol trees. These trees grow in the place where the sun rises, so they are called as the rising sun.

The Phoenix cleans its feathers in Ruisuo River, and then sings and flies high to attract the bird in his heart.

The poem uses loyal and noble images such as "Chinese parasol trees" and "Phoenix" to portray Xiang-ru's love toward Wen-jun. And at the same time, it uses the Chorus of Phoenixes, as well as the parasol tree showering in the morning glow to symbolize the noble character of Xiang-ru and the loyal love. The poem gives the appraisal to this story and the character of its hero.

Du Fu wrote in his poem Qintai,

Although Xiang-ru Si-ma was old and sick, he still loved Wen-jun deeply.

In those days, they flouted the secular etiquette and law through running a "tavern".

I wandered silently on the Qintai terrace, looking at the evening clouds. I admire their stories in my heart.

A cluster of beautiful wildflowers grow beside the terrace; it seems to be the smile on Wen-jun's cheeks;

A cluster of verdant vines looks like the light green skirt Wen-jun used to wear.

Xiang-ru held loyal and steadfast love toward Wen-jun. Sadly, afterwards there's no such

moving love stories in the world.

The poet wrote the unswerving love of Xiang-ru and Wen-jun from the perspective of their later life in Maoling. The deep love in their old age reflects the beauty of their romance in those days. The two sentences of “beautiful wildflowers seem to be the smile on Wen-jun’s cheeks; verdant vines look like the light green skirt Wen-jun used to wear” reproduce the brilliant image of Wen-jun. With the appearance of Wen-jun, the spirit and figure of Xiang-ru also manifest. The epilogue “Xiang-ru hold loyal and steadfast love toward Wen-jun. Sadly, afterwards there’s no such moving love stories in the world”, provides a clear and forceful summary of the whole poem. In the poet’s eyes, the meaning contained in Qin Song is the true love which is worth reciting for thousands of years. As the poet said, there is no more such love stories in this world.

Like Fu Du, there are many poets who praised Wen-jun’s love. Yi-tian Chen, a poet of Qing Dynasty, also wrote Qintai Terrace. There is the saying, “the lady could find out person with true talent; the scholar should go to Linqiong”.^[3] On the one hand, the poet praised Xiang-ru Si-ma’s talent; on the other hand, he praised Wen-jun Zhuo’s courage to pursue love and her clever to find out true talents. Wei Shu, a poet of the Qing Dynasty, wrote The Hometown of Si-ma. There are the sentences, “the woman was quite beautiful and intelligent; the talent she loved was also appreciated by the Emperor.” The writer used the appreciation of Wen-jun Zhuo and the Emperor Wudi to show the personality charm of Xiang-ru, which is a different approach with previous examples but produces equally satisfactory result. The poet You Che in Qing Dynasty wrote the Two Pieces of Qintai, and expressed “held the Qin and went to a desolate village, Xiang-ru was lonely and helplessness. He played Qin to all celebrities in Linqiong, but no one said a word. The only friend keenly appreciative of his talents was Wang-sun Zhuo.” This poem shows quite new ideas. It changed the habits of poets in criticizing Wang-sun Zhuo one-sidedly. He held that Xiang-ru Si-ma’s political ambition and literary ability were not appreciated in Linqiong. Only Wang-sun Zhuo had the unique wisdom and understanding that he was a man of great ability. So through the county magistrate, Xiang-ru Si-ma was introduced into his mansion. Then his daughter Wen-jun, fell in love with Xiang-ru ran away with him. A gifted youth attracted a beautiful lady; the lady eloped with the young man. The legendary and romantic love story is an excellent theme for poets of all dynasties.

From the romance of “Playing Qin to Flirt Wen-jun”, to the legendary singing of the two Qin Songs and Feng Qiu Huang, Xiang-ru Si-ma’s title of the “man faithful to love” was not easy to come by. His romantic love story with Wen-jun Zhuo was also remembered by Fu Du and other later poets, which shows its influence.

3. The Master of Cifu Poetry: “Excellent, Unprecedented Poems”

Xiang-ru Si-ma, Xiong Yang, Gu Ban and Heng Zhang are known as the “Four Great Masters of Cifu Poetry in Han Dynasty”. Gu Ban commented on Xiang-ru Si-ma’s works in the History of the Han Dynasty, “Xiang-ru used flowery language to describe grand events. The fables are gorgeous and satiric with ironic metaphors from beginning to the end. A large number of objects and sceneries are put together, present a splendid sight. It can be said that his works are the best Cifu poetry.”^[4] Xiong Yang also appreciated his Cifu poetry and described Xiang-ru in his Letter Respond to Tan Huan, “Xiang-ru’s Fu poetry does not seem to come from the human world. It must be the fairy who can create such beautiful poems”^[5] In The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, Xie Liu says, “Xiang-ru is a genius in composing Fu poetry. His works are splendid as if the spirit in these poems can soar straight up into the sky. His Fu poems are the best because of the forceful expression.”^[6] Xiang-ru was also called as “the Sage of Fu” by scholars such as Wen-xuan Lin, Ying-lin Wang and Shi-zhen Wang. In Lu Xun’s Outline of Chinese Literary History, Xiang-ru Si-ma and Qian Si-ma are commented on in a special section. It is pointed out that “in the time of Emperor Wu, Xiang-ru Si-ma wrote the best Fu poetry, while Qian Si-ma wrote the best prose”^[7].

The poets of all dynasties also praised Xiang-ru as the Master of Cifu poetry. In his poem Qin-tai of Xiang-ru, the Qing poet Che Sun even used the phrase, “excellent, unprecedented poems” to show Xiang-ru Si-ma’s historic position as a milestone in the history of Chinese literature. Then,

how did Xiang-ru achieved this fame?

3.1 “Should learn the ambition of Xiang-ru, which cannot be withdrawn in any circumstances”: the ambition of young Xiang-ru

Qu Chang wrote in the Records of Huayang, “there is a Shengxian Bridge and a temple in ten miles north to Chengdu. When Xiang-ru Si-ma first went to Chang’an he said, ‘I will come back here, sitting in the red carriage drawn by four horses.’”^[8] It is said that Xiang-ru Si-ma wrote this oath on the pillar of the bridge when he first went to Chang’an. To cross the bridge and embark on the journey, Xiang-ru said good bye to his relatives. The ‘red carriage drawn by four horses’ refers to a vehicle used exclusively by dignitaries. Later, Xiang-ru went to southwest as the “Zhonglang General”. He crossed the bridge again, sitting in the red carriage drawn by four horses as his wish. Sheng Cen wrote in the poem, Shengxian Bridge that, “Xiang-ru returned home after crossing the bridge. He sat in the carriage drawn by four horses.”^[9]

People of the later generations often extol the story of writing down ambition on the bridge. Hun Xu, a poet of the Tang Dynasty, encouraged himself in his Two Poems Written on the Mountain Perch of Sun When Leave for the Captial, “You should learn from Xiang’ru, and eventually come back in the carriage drawn by four horses.” Mu Du wrote in Sending Friends Lived in Central Hunan, “Xiang-ru’s ambition was written on the bridge, there’s no reason for you to indulge yourself in fishing by the river.” The poet advised his friend not to be depressed, but to be ambitious and indignant. Xun-he Du wrote in Sign with Emotions, “Every time I read the inscription on the bridge, I repeat Xiang-ru’s ambition; I carry a seal by my side, hoping to become a person like Zi-rong Ji.” The poet is full of confidence and prides like Xiang-ru. Zhong Li, a poet of the Southern Tang Dynasty was frustrated for all his talent. He said in his poem To the Person Who Know me, “the inscription on bridge did not show Xiang-ru’s ambition; knocking the ox horn, who will feel sorry for Ningqi’s songs?” In Quintai of Xiang-ru Si-ma, Qi Song extolled Xiang-ru Si-ma’s role of the best lover through “he leaved by the midnight, riding a phoenix; afterwards he came back, sitting in the carriage drawn by four horses.”

3.2 The appreciation of the Emperor: the three Fu poems can compete with the sun and stars for brightness, Xiang-ru’s works were the best at that time.

Xiang-ru Si-ma’s career was unsuccessful during Emperor Jingdi’s reign. But the later Emperor Wudi loved of Cifu poetry, and deeply appreciated Xiang-ru’s talent. Xiang-ru’s works Zixu Fu, Shanglin Fu and Changmen Fu are the best at that time. As Chong Chen, a poet of Qing Dynasty, said in The Historical Poem, Volume 3, “In the royal garden, scholars are asked to introduce good Fu writers. No one knew Xiang-ru Si-ma at that time. After Xiang-ru finished Zixu Fu and Shanglin Fu, the common people, as well as the emperor, are shocked by his talent.” Bo Shao, a poet of the Song Dynasty, praised Xiang-ru Si-ma in this Annotation of Xiang-ru’s Quintai, “the three Fu poems can compete with the sun and stars for brightness, the one book recorded everything from the remote antiquity to the present.” The “one book” refers to the posthumous article of Xing-ru, Offering Sacrifices to Heaven. In Tang Dynasty, poet Kuang Tian wrote Annotation of Quintai and highly praised Xiang-ru’s talent as following: “articles written in the Western Han Dynasty are known to the world, Xiang-ru’s works were the best at that time.”

From Si Zuo in Wei and Jin Dynasty to Du Li in the flourishing Tang Dynasty and Da-Kui Liu in Qing Dynasty, these poets compare themselves with Xiang-ru, which shows that the Master of Cifu is highly respected. Si Zuo wrote in the Eight Poems on History, “The house of Xiong Yang was quite silent, since the owner did not have contacts with other officials. In the empty space, Yang lived a secluded life, writing books to talk about mysterious principles of Tao. When writing, the works of Confucius and Xiang-ru are the imitation objects.” The poet compares Yang’s speech with that of Confucius, and his Cifu with Si-ma’s poetry, which shows his respect for Xiang-ru. In the second poem in Bai Li’s Two Poems to Xiang-gao Zhang, the writer wrote, “Before the age of fifteen, I read fantastic books (excellent works with novel ideas and excellent techniques) and wrote songs and essays at the same level as Xiang-ru Si-ma.” He compares his own Cifu with Xiang-ru. In Thanks to the Gift of Gao, Fu Du expressed “My humble cottage cannot be compared with the

mansion of Xiong Yang; my talent of writing may be comparable with that of Xiang-ru". In *To the King of Fengwei*, Du compared himself with Xiang-ru again by saying, "I am too old that all my hairs turn white. I cannot follow your order and write good poems. It is a shame that I am not as talent as Xiang-ru." Da-kui Liu, a poet of Tongcheng School in the Qing Dynasty, wrote the words "the talent of Si-ma is unrestrained; his works are as good as those of Qu-yuan and Song-yu", which fully expressed his high praise of the verse written by Xiang-ru. He believed that Xiang-ru Si-ma's literary achievements could match those of Qu-yuan and Song-yu.

3.3 The united family of Hua (the Han Nationality) and Yi (Minority Groups), Xiang-ru's posthumous papers Offering Sacrifices to Heaven: a versatile person in literature and politics

Xiang-ru Si-ma has not only high literary talent, but also extraordinary political talent. Xiang-ru urged Emperor Wudi of Han Dynasty to get in touch with minority groups lived in the southwest, so as to make good relations with the frontier nationalities and consolidate the frontier defense through his article, *Conversation with People Lived in Shu*. Xie Yang in Qing Dynasty wrote the poem *Bridge of Four Horses*, which enthusiastically praised the political talents displayed by Xiang-ru in the activities of communication with southwest minority groups from a unique perspective: "The prosperous Han Dynasty is inclusive; even Qin communicated with minority, let alone the Han Dynasty. Through opening the path, the Han nationality and minority groups can become a united family." At the beginning, it is pointed out that even the violent Qin Dynasty, which abused the people's power, was closely related to the southwest minority groups, not to mention the prosperous Han Dynasty. With full enthusiasm, the poet eulogizes the great historical event of Emperor Wudi's communication with minority groups lived in the southwest.

The political talent of the Xiang-ru is more obviously embodied in the posthumous paper, *Offering Sacrifices to Heaven*, which is also called the *Maoling Script* because he lived in Maoling in old age. In the fifth year of the Yuanshou Dynasty (118 BC), Xiang-ru was exempted from official duties because of illness and lived in Maoling. Emperor Wudi sent his loyalty servants to Maoling, but Xiang-ru had died, leaving the script. The emperor was amazed at this article. There are many poems chanting the *Maoling Script*. In Chen of Southern Dynasty, Sun-deng Zu wrote *Fu of Xiang-ru Si-ma*, and said that "the Han emperor was regretful to read this script after his death." [10] Bai Li wrote *Crying for Zhengjun Jiang in Xuancheng City*, saying "the script of *Offering Sacrifices to Heaven* is the only thing left." Gui-meng Lu wrote *Thanks to Ginseng Sent by my Friend*, saying "ginseng can moisten Xiang-ru's lungs; the script of *Offering Sacrifices to Heaven* moved the emperor". In the Ming Dynasty, Xian-zu Tang wrote the *Two Poems of Xiang-ru*. There is the sentence, "the bright glory fades down; *Offering Sacrifices to Heaven* became the posthumous paper of Xiang-ru".

4. Conclusion

The romantic love story and excellent literary talents of Xiang-ru Si-ma are affirmed by poets of all dynasties. In the poem *Fengling Palace*, Mu Du said, "Xiang'ru is the last master of Cifu poetry"; his appreciations show between the lines. Jing Chang, a poet of the Northern Wei Dynasty, praised Xiang-ru Si-ma with Bao Wang, Jun-ping Yan and Xiong Yang. The first piece of his *Four Poems on Praise of the Four Gentlemen* is the best summary of the elegant style and outstanding personality of Xiang-ru. "Xiang-ru had brilliant talents in writing fantastic articles; he was preeminent at that time. His works are as beautiful as cloud and mist in the spring and as brilliant as the shining moon in the autumn. He did not have a successful official career, but that's not something that we can determine. One's destiny is prescribed by the Heaven."

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