



# A Survey for Research Literature Review of the Origin, Spread and Variation of the Chinese Folk Song “Jasmine Flower”

Liang Tao<sup>1,3</sup>(✉), Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan<sup>2</sup>, and Lee Chie Tsang Isaiah<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Guizhou Education University, Guizhou, China  
49157216@qq.com

<sup>2</sup> Borneo Institute for Indigenous Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia  
jacquie@ums.edu.my

<sup>3</sup> Academy of Arts and Creative Technology, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu,  
Malaysia  
chie\_tsang@ums.edu.my

**Abstract.** *Jasmine Flower* is a well-known Chinese Han folk song that holds significant historical and cultural importance in China and beyond. Its influence extends to the realm of world music as well. Chinese academic circles began to study the Chinese traditional folk song Jasmine Flower around the 1980s. The main disputes about this folk song are the region of origin and the attribution of various variants. It briefly introduces some basic research done since the 1980s, some about the origins, variations of Jasmine Flower, and relevant several important researchers. The discussion emphasizes some of the main researchers and their work over the years, especially in the fields and history sources of anthropology, linguistics and ethnomusicology.

**Keywords:** Jasmine Flower · folk song · origin · history · ethnomusicology

## 1 Introduction

The Chinese folk song “Jasmine Flower” is a widely recognized Han folk song that has significant importance in Chinese and global music history [25]. It has cross-regional and cross-genre popularity, providing rich material for contemporary music creation [45]. The emergence of the song has not been specifically dated, but it was very popular during the Ming and Qing dynasties [43]. The song evolved in different regions, and in the early 19th century, it spread to Europe and became a household name “Chinese symbol” [7, 8]. Chinese scholars began studying Jasmine Flower in the 1980s, and over 40 articles have been written about its occurrence, origin, and evolution. It can be seen that the generation and evolution of Jasmine Flower is a subject of academic attention.

## 2 Research on Origin

The earliest research result on the origin of Jasmine Flower is Jasmine Flower with Fragrance by Professor Yi Ren (1982) [43]. He pointed out the prototype of Jasmine Flower and its earliest name should be *Shuang Die Cui* (two greens). The earliest musical notation literature of Jasmine Flower was listed in the Qing Dynasty's *Xiaohui Collection* [30, 31]. Some scholars excavated three works that recorded the situation of Jasmine Flower, including "*Making White Fur*" (1763–1774), "*Travels In China*" (1804) and "*Xiaohui Collection*" (1837) [13, 30]. These three anthologies are considered the earliest documented accounts of the origin of Jasmine Flower.

French philosopher Rousseau's Musical Dictionary in 1768 included the Chinese folk song Jasmine Flower, and that the song was collected in China by an Englishman named Barrow in 1794 [18]. However, Barrow did not specify where he recorded this folk song. Scholars have debated whether the song originated in the north or south of China. Wang Zhiyi (1999) compared the four representative versions of Jasmine Flower from geographical attribute in Jiangsu, Hubei, northwest, and northeast regions and finds that all four versions have the characteristics of northern music of Han nationality, suggesting a northern origin for the song [34]. The article challenges the assumption that the most widely sung version of the song in Jiangsu must be a southern folk song and suggests that historical and cultural background should also be considered when exploring the geographical origin of the song.

Another scholar, Xia Lin (2011) compared the melodies of four different local versions of Jasmine Flower in northern China. She pointed out that the main musical framework has the attributes of northern Han folk songs, but does not have the basic framework of southern music [36].

From the perspective of regional communication culture, Wang Nina (2011) compared the Jiangsu version of Jasmine Flower with other folk songs in the north and pointed out that music form analysis of the "Jasmine Flower" itself and there are many of the same origin and northern folk song structure, combined with its spread and traceability of judgment, can tell a song "Jasmine Flower" is the northern folk song to Jiangnan (Jiangsu province and Zhejiang province), after it is assimilated by the local music style of product, rather than native Jiangnan (South Of the Yangtze River) folk songs [32].

On the other hand, some scholars believe that Jasmine Flower originated in Jiangsu province in southern China, but they disagree on which part of Jiangsu province it originated from. In 2006, anthropologist Feng Guangyu analyzed the music score of Jasmine Flower in *Xiaohui Collection* and *Travels In China* and compared it with Jasmine Flower, which is popular [6].

In 2006, Zhou Yang Tianyu, a journalist, interviewed a famous Chinese folk scholar, Wang Yongjian. He reported that after years of investigation and research, the predecessor of the popular song Jasmine Flower originated in Nanjing and was sung in Nanjing as early as the early Ming Dynasty [48]. Tashi Liu, another well-known expert on folklore in China, also told the reporter that when he was doing research in a village in southern Gansu province, the head of the village told him about the song. But the report provides only clues, not substantial evidence.

An equally supportive and enlightening is from Li Bing (2013), which discussed the folk song's origin and spread based on the music geography [15]. It suggested that

Jasmine Flower was created in a specific time and space and had a wide spread of power if it bloomed near the capital of a country. The article also highlights the significance of studying the origin and spread of folk songs from the perspective of music geography.

Sun Yiming (2010) discussed that Jiangsu dialect may affect the variant of Jasmine Flower [27]. In 2017, Yang Ruiqing, a researcher at the Kunshan County Cultural Center of Jiangsu province, believes that “Jasmine Flower” most likely originated in southern Jiangsu province [41].

The lyrics of the current Jiangsu version were mainly determined by the Chinese composer, He Fang, in 1942 [9]. However, some scholars have debated the accuracy of attributing the song to He Fang, and others believe the origin of Jasmine Flower cannot be found. But later, some scholars raised objections to why the composer signed the Jiangsu version of Jasmine Flower as his own name. For example, Cheng Gang severely criticized the practice in his newspaper article “Jasmine Flower is wrong to be signed By He Fang” [3]. The editors from Compilation Committee of Chinese Folk Songs, pointed out the social on some inaccurate perceptions of jiangsu folk song, Jasmine Flower [4].

In 2007, Zhu Xinhua first denied that Liuhe county is the birthplace of Jasmine Flower, and then considers that the origin of Jasmine Flower cannot be determined in combination with the characteristics of the spread of minor folk songs and the actual situation of the popularity of Jasmine Flower in Jiangsu. In this paper, the author adopted the comparative method used in ontology research and the comparative method used in origin research.

In addition, Wang Guiqin (2008) discussed the laws of the dissemination of some folk songs [31]. In the end, she thought that due to the disordered nature of folk song transmission, it is quite difficult to discuss the origin of such a widespread folk song. In this way, it is difficult to find its original birthplace for those who have historical records and melodies at home and abroad. Xia Yurun proposed in 2006 that Jasmine Flower originated from Flower Drum Opera of Fengyang [36]. Lian Yun (2010) suggested that the origin of Jasmine Flower might remain a mystery [21].

In 2007, Liu Yebo discussed the record and spread of "Jasmine Flower" and analyzed Hebei and Jiangsu folk song versions of “Jasmine Flower” through comparative analysis of singing style, music structure, lining words, and more [23]. Zhu Xinhua (2007) suggested that Jasmine Flower originated in local drama music in Anhui province, not Jiangsu Province [48]. Most scholars, however, agree that Jasmine Flower originated in Jiangsu province without specifying a city or county.

Qin Jiangli (2011) pointed out that through the Ming Dynasty national immigration of some historical facts [26]. For example, according to the official records of Liuhe County, the population of Liuhe County in Jiangsu Province grew rapidly to 2,685 households and 31,156 households during the seven years of Zhengde reign in the Ming Dynasty. This provides a fresh way to study the spread of Jasmine Flower and even other folk songs.

## 3 Infiltrate into Other Musical Genres

### 3.1 Local Opera or Drama

Dr. Yang Sitong suggested that “Jasmine Flower” folk song may have originated from the “Flower Drum Song” recorded in the folk drama, *Flower Drum Opera*, in Fengyang county, Anhui Province. In this traditional opera, lower Drum Songs served as the “introduction” of a complete narrative [42]. Hence this opera is the origin of Jasmine Flower’s original form.

However, the history of how it became independent from the narrative, evolved into a single ditty, and was transformed in dissemination needs further exploration. The article confirms that in early times, the tune of Jasmine Flower had been used in some Chinese local operas. This view is consistent with view from Xia Yurun, Ming Dynasty history expert [36].

Bai Jie (2011) showed that the evolution of a musical drama is similar to Jasmine Flower’s melody in view of the drama [1]. Wei Ren, a folk art researcher in Yangzhou city from Jiangsu Province, believes that the local drama - Yangzhou Qingqu, has a close relationship with Jasmine Flower. She introduced related similar songs in the chapter “Yangzhou Qingqu and Jasmine Flower,” providing a useful reference for cross-genre music of Jasmine Flower [35].

### 3.2 Life and Religion

Lin (2019) discussed the use of Jasmine Flower in Taoist ritual music and its relationship with religious music and living objects [16]. He mainly contrasted the application of the folk song Jasmine Flower in Taoist music of The Yongjia Zheng school of Taoism and introduced the tune of Jasmine Flower played in an 18th-century British copper-coated inlaid stone tower bell housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing. These new materials help readers to understand the musical form of Jasmine Flower in the Qing Dynasty and its spread, and supplement previous studies.

Zhang En (2005) claimed that a monk identified the tune of Jasmine Flower as possibly originating from Ba Duan Jin, a Buddhist music from Shanxi Province [44]. However, he did not provide the Buddhist music score of *Ba Duan Jin*, making its reliability uncertain.

## 4 Study on Variation

The Jasmine Flower mutates into several versions as it spreads to different regions, attracting scholars to pay attention. Di Qian (2009) analyzed three regional versions of the folk song, highlighting their symbiosis and origin relationship [5]. Li Bing (2013) also compared three regional versions of the folk song Jasmine Flower in south China, discussing the evolution in the same folk song style region, and considers regional language and geography as factors affecting the song [14, 15]. An vocal music teacher, Li Shuqing (2008), noted that each variant of Jasmine Flower forms its own specific singing mode and contains strong national and local characteristics, with differences in lyrics, rhythm, mode, and grace notes forming different styles [17].

Chen Liujie (2011) discussed the variations of Jasmine Flower from the perspective of cultural anthropology and affirmed that different regional cultures cause the different styles of Jasmine Flower folk song [2]. Li Yuqiang (2009) explained the artistic style and characteristics of Jasmine Flower in different places but did not delve into the mechanisms behind the variation [20]. In 2011, Wang compared Jasmine Flower from Jiangsu and Hebei and pointed out their similar relationships but did not extensively explore this [33]. Sun (2007) analyzed the characteristics of Jasmine Flower varieties in Jiangsu and Hebei and noted the presence of local opera elements in the Hebei version [27]. Liu Sha (2016) compared “Jasmine Flower” and “Flesh Flower Melody” but could only make a limited comparison due to the unknown region of collection for Barrow’s version of Jasmine Flower [22].

Li Yan (2016) compared musical form of Jasmine Flower of Han nationality in Jiangsu and the Hui nationality in Xinjiang [18]. This study is the first on variant version of Han Jasmine Flower in Xinjiang. Wang Fei (2019) identified 15 sub-genre versions of Jasmine Flower from Shanxi province with same clan characteristics, and then compared, analyzed them in music form, highlighting mutual influence of local folk songs and Jasmine Flower theme [29].

Current studies only focus on variation of Jasmine Flower in different regions and styles without exploring rheological law, indicating need for further research into rules of folk song spread and variation.

## 5 History of Communication

In 1980, a famous musicologist, Qian Renkang published “*Mother, You are So Confused*” and “*Jasmine Flower in Foreign Country*”, traced the spread of these folk songs abroad, particularly the influence of British missionary Barlow [24, 25]. However, an error in his description of Barrow’s work resulted in subsequent mistakes by Chinese scholars (Gong 2013) [7, 8]. In 1992, Wang Ermin corrected this error and provided critical references for the spread of Jasmine Flower [27]. Later, Huang Yinong discussed the international version of Jasmine Flower [11]. In 2013, Gong Hongyu corrected some flaws in a previous paper on the spread and evolution of the song in Europe and America, adding further cases to fill gaps in research.

Jiang Wei (2015) studied the variation of Jasmine Flower in overseas spread and discussed the cultural role played by the folk song, but did not delve into the differences in aesthetics at the music score ontology level [12]. Yang Lulu (2012) reviewed the spread process of Jasmine Flower in China but did not cover variation [40]. Yang Guixiang (1993) traced the earliest record of the spread of Jasmine Flower to Japan during the period of Japanese colonial rule, while Zheng Jinyang (2003) included a score of Jasmine Flower in his study of Qing Music in Japan [39, 46]. Xu Yuanyong (2007) found an early Japanese publication that included Jasmine Flower and showed its influence on the Japanese school song of the same name. These articles collectively depict the spread of Jasmine Flower in Japan [38].

## 6 Conclusion

This paper briefly introduces some basic research done since the 1980s, some about the origins, variations of Jasmine Flower, and relevant several important researchers. The discussion emphasizes some of the main researchers and their work over the years, especially in the fields and history sources of anthropology, linguistics and ethnomusicology. From the origin of Jasmine Flower to its spread, the discussion on its musical form analysis, deductive form, style and aesthetic style has never been interrupted. Ethnomusicology could be used as the leading research method, and the research methods of linguistics and history could be combined to further expand the related research of Jasmine folk songs in more depth and detail.

## References

1. Bai jie. (2008). *The evolution of jasmine Flower*. Journal of Ludong University.2008 (05) 25.
2. Chen Liujie. (2011). *On the phenomenon of homogenous variation of Chinese folk songs from the perspective of cultural anthropology: a case study of Chinese folk song Jasmine*. Music Space and Time (Theory edition) .2012 (003).
3. Cheng Gang. (2008). *It was a mistake for the jasmine flower to be signed He Fang*. Nanjing Morning Post. September 22, 2008.
4. Compilation Committee of Chinese Folk Songs, Jiangsu Volume. (2007). *Correction opinions on various inaccurate opinions about Jiangsu folk song jasmine in the current society*. People's Music. 2007 (06).
5. Di Qi-an. (2009). *The evolution of Jasmine in three Han Folk songs in different regions*. Huang Zhong (Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music).2009.
6. Feng Guangyu. (2006). *Jasmine Flower where flowers bloom?* Symphony. 2006(04) : 19.
7. Gong H Y. (2013). *Misreading, omission and exaggeration in the study of Sino-Western musical communication: A case study of the folk song Jasmine Flower overseas*. Music Research. 2013(1):95.
8. Gong H Y. 2013. *Study on the spread and evolution of folk song jasmine in Europe and America -- 1795-1917*. Journal of Central Conservatory of Music.2013 (01) : 79-92.
9. He Fang.(1992). *Rooted in China, fragrance wafts all over the world and five continents -- a collection of Jiangsu folk song jasmine*. Jiangsu Music.1992 (02) (4).
10. He Fang.(2006). *The story of the Jasmine Flower*. Music Weekly.2000 (08).
11. Huang Yinong. (2009). *The West spread and East return of Chinese folk song Jasmine*. Culture and Philosophy. 2006(9) : 1 – 16.
12. Jiang Wei. (2015). *A preliminary study on the variation of the folk song Jasmine Flower in the process of spreading abroad*. Chinese and Foreign Culture and Literary Theory.2015 (04).
13. John Barrow. (1804). *Travels in China*. London: Cadell&W. Davies.1804.
14. Li Bing. (2013). *Analysis of the jasmine style of folk songs in southern China*. Popular Literature and Art, 2013(17):138-139.
15. Li Bing. (2013). *The origin of folk song "Jasmine Flower" from the perspective of musical geography*. Journal of Hubei University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Science Edition). 2013, (03): 55-58.
16. Lin Lice. (2019). *Analysis on the relationship between Ruyi Xiangzan and Jasmine flower*. Music Research.2019(4).93-103.
17. Li Shuqing. (2008). *On the evolution of jasmine in different regions*. China Science and Education Innovation Guide.2008 (07).

18. Li Yan. (2016). *Similarities and differences between Jiangsu Han folk song Jasmine and Xinjiang Hui folk song Jasmine*. Ethnomusicology 2018 (15).
19. Li Yilan. (2008). *The spread history of Jasmine flower*. Southern Weekend.2008 (08) – 14.
20. Li Yuqiang. (2009). *East, West, North, South, jasmine fragrance -- the artistic characteristics of jasmine flowers in different regions*. Journal of Changsha University. 2009(01).
21. Lian Yun. (2010). *The inheritance and evolution of Chinese traditional music culture: From the contention of the origin of Folk song Jasmine flower*. One Hundred Arts. 2010 (08).
22. Liu Sha. (2016). *A comparative study of Jasmine flower and Hua Hua Diao*. Contemporary Music. 2016 (23):81-82.
23. Liu, Y. b. (2007). *The treasure of folk music, Jasmine flower*. Journal of Shaoyang University (Social Science Edition).2007 (04): 122–124.
24. Qian R K. (1997). *The first Chinese folk song spread abroad -- “Jasmine Flower”*. Qian Renkang selected music essays (1). Shanghai Music Publishing House, 1997.
25. Qian R K. (1980). “*Mama is So Silly “and” Jasmine Flower “abroad*”. Essays on Music. 1980(3).
26. Qin Jiangli. (2011). *Who is the source of folk songs, let jasmine float across the river*. Music Time and Space. 2011 (10):32-33.
27. Sun Weizai. (2007). *Flowers in Full bloom, Colorful: On different Styles of Different places and Jasmine Flowers*. Folk Songs. 2007 (04x).
28. Wang Ermin. (2002). “*Jasmine Flower” and other folk songs spread west to Europe for 200 years*. Modern Cultural Ecology and Its Changes. Nanchang: Baihuazhou Literature and Art Publishing House. 2002:176–191.
29. Wang Fei. (2019). *Study on Shanxi Tongzong Folk Song “Jasmine Flower”*. Art Review. 2019 (09):11-15.
30. Wang Guiqin. (2005). *The earliest musical literature of Jasmine flower*. Yuefu New Sound (Journal of Shenyang Music).2005.09.
31. Wang Guiqin. (2008). *Not all places where folk songs are popular are places of origin -- From the spread of Jasmine flower*. Music Exploration.2008.28–32.
32. Wang Nina. (2011). *On the northern nature of Jiangsu folk song Jasmine*. Popular Literature and Art. 2011 (08): 2-3.
33. Wang Ahijun. (2011). *Folk Culture and Folk songs in the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal area and asmine flower's Change of artistic style*. Hundred Arts.2011.223–226.
34. Wang Zhiyi. (1999). *Geographical attributes of jasmine*. Huang Zhong.1999 (04) :96–99.
35. Wei Ren. (2006). Chapter: Yangzhou Qing Qu and Jasmine flower. Yangzhou Qing Qu · *Qu Art Discussion volume*. Guangling Publishing House.2006.
36. Xia Lin. (2011). *The origin and Origin of folk song Jasmine*. The Sound of the Yellow River 2011 (13).
37. Xia, Yurun. (2006). *Where is jasmine folk song?* Literature and Art Daily. March 9, 2006.
38. Xu Yuanyong. (2007). *Study on minor tone spectrum in Xiaohui Collection*. China Music.2007 (04):64-69.
39. Yang Guixiang. (1993). *Ming and Qing Music -- Chinese music passed down to Nagasaki, Japan*. Journal of Central Conservatory of Music.1993 (01):77-83.
40. Yang Lulu. (2012). *Review of jasmine flower and its spread*. Journal of Shenyang Normal University (Social Science Edition).2012.
41. Yang Ruiqing. (2017). *Origin of Jasmine Flower and big stage media*. Music Communication. 2017 (01):112-114.
42. Yang Sitong. (2013). *On Folk songs Jasmine the original form of literature*. Art.2013 (05)
43. Yi Ren. (1982). *Jasmine flowers with fragrance*. Yi Yuan.1982 (01).
44. Zhang En. (2005). *Jasmine originally refers to Buddhist music*. Northern Music.2005 (04)
45. Zhang Ge. (2008). *Using comparative musicology to study folk songs -- Taking jasmine Flower as an example*. Science and Technology Information.2008 (20):239-239.

46. Zheng jinyang. (2003). *Research on Qing Music in Japan*. Fuzhou: Straits Literature and Art Publishing House. 2003:5–246
47. Zhou Yang Tianyu. (2005). *What a jasmine flower comes from Nanjing in Ming Dynasty*. Jinling Evening News.2005/12/ 18
48. Zhu Xinhua. (2007). Jiangsu folk song “Jasmine Flower” who belongs to. People’s Music.2007 (06) : 50-58

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

