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Dancing Through Rivers and Mountains: Nature, Society, and Emotional Expression in Lisu Music and Dance

Thesis presented by

Keyi Liu, MA, BA

ORCID 0009-0001-0003-5292

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Department of Music

Head of School/Department: Jeffrey Weeter

Supervisor(s): Jonathan Stock, Alexander Khalil

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Abstract

The Lisu are a trans-border ethnic group found in Yunnan, SW China and also in neighbouring states including Myanmar, Thailand, India, and the Philippines. With a long history of migration and extensive migration routes, the Lisu people's musical culture is currently marked by high diversity.

During 2020-2021, I conducted fieldwork in several Lisu communities in Yunnan, focusing on a wide range of individuals from renowned musicians and enthusiastic music hobbyists passionate about singing or dancing, to everyday individuals and those working in NGOs or government institutions and playing a part in cultural transmission. Initially, this research delved into the musical and dance practices in their daily lives and activities, aiming to understand the world of Lisu music and dance from their perspective. Furthermore, while acknowledging the diversity within the Lisu musical culture, the study explored their multi-layered identity.

Additionally, the research sought to comprehend how the Lisu employ musical and dance expressions to forge social connections, encompassing interactions within the community, with their environment, and with other ethnic groups. It further investigated how these expressive forms correlate with their sense of being, knowledge, and emotional experiences. Lisu music and dance embodies not only the context of their communally defined spaces, time, and environment and are also rooted deeply in Lisu understandings of their history, contact with nature, and life strategies. From this standpoint, Lisu experiences offer a case study for improving human happiness indices and contributing to human welfare.

Lastly, considering the various forms and societal functions of Lisu musical culture, I also reflects on fieldwork and ethnographic writing: I ask how can we, under a commitment to justice, respect for cultural diversity, and an open attitude to equal dialogue, elucidate the multifaceted nature of Lisu music culture and safeguard the authenticity and autonomy of its unique cultural expressions.

The thesis comprises 7 chapters which introduce the research, describe Lisu society and preceding research, analyse song traditions and the roles of musical instruments, assess three significant genres of Lisu dance, and look at how all these expressive mediums are combined in the celebrations that occur at Lisu weddings. The final chapter contextualises the thesis's major conclusions and prospects for future research.

摘要

傈僳族是一个跨国分布的民族，主要聚居在中国的云南省及其邻国，包括缅甸、泰国、印度和菲律宾。鉴于其长期的迁徙历史和广泛的迁徙路线，傈僳族的音乐文化现今呈现出高度的多样性。于 2020-2021 年，我对云南省的几个傈僳族社区进行了田野调查，采用了多点，短期以及较长期驻扎的结合方式。调查对象包括知名的音乐家、热衷歌唱或舞蹈的音乐爱好者、以及日常生活中的普通人和那些在非政府组织或政府机构工作、参与文化传播的精英人士。首先，这项研究探讨了他们在日常生活以及活动中音乐和舞蹈的实践，旨在从傈僳族的视角了解其音乐和舞蹈的世界；在承认傈僳族音乐文化多样性的基础上，进一步探索其多层次的身份认同。其次，本研究还试图理解傈僳族如何通过音乐和舞蹈的表现形式来构建社会关系，这包括社区内部、与周围自然环境以及与其他族群的互动。在此基础上，我进一步探索了这种表现形式如何与他们的存在感、知识和情感体验相联系，研究发现傈僳族的音乐和舞蹈不仅反映了他们对于空间、时间、环境和社群的共同认知，更深入地体现了他们对历史、与自然的联系以及生活策略的理解。从这个视角出发，傈僳族的经验可以为提高人类的幸福感和促进人类福祉提供一个研究案例。最后，鉴于傈僳族音乐文化的多种形态和社会功能，本研究还对田野调查和民族志写作进行了反思：在追求公正、尊重文化多样性并保持开放与平等对话的前提下，我们如何更准确地展现傈僳族音乐文化的多样性；确保其文化表达的真实性和独立性得到妥善保护。

本论文共分为七章。首章介绍了研究背景；接下来的章节详细描述了傈僳族的社会和先前的相关研究，分析了傈僳族的歌曲以及乐器在其中的作用，对三种重要的傈僳族舞蹈形式进行了评估，以及探索这些艺术表达形式在傈僳族婚礼庆典中是如何融为一体的。最后一章则对整体研究的主要发现进行了总结，并展望了未来的研究方向。

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Note on Languages

Most of this research was carried out in Mandarin and Lisu language. Despite the prevailing dominance of Han culture, the Lisu language remains a prevalent medium of communication amongst the Lisu people, especially those in mountainous regions. Historically, the Lisu people primarily relied on oral traditions for knowledge transmission, with no writing system in place until the 20th century. Consequently, our understanding of Lisu music and dance before this period is primarily derived from records written by other ethnic groups, as well as western colonial rulers, explorers, and missionaries. These records took various forms, such as official documents, travelogues, diaries, and books (see further Henry 1898:196-7 and Rose 1910:254). There are no existing documents or written artifacts left by the Lisu people themselves before 20th century.

After that, several Lisu written forms were gradually created. The most used Lisu writing system in the world today is an abugida (a series of symbols that combine consonant and vowel sounds) invented between around 1915 and improved by James O. Fraser in 1922, namely "Fraser script" (1922). The Fraser script is widely used among the Lisu people in north of Thailand, Myanmar and Indian. It is what the Lisu people now commonly refer to as the "old Lisu script." In China, it is only used in small proportion of Lisu people who have converted to Christianity in China, mostly in the Nujiang region and rarely in Lijiang prefecture and Weixi county. Another written form is a syllabic Script which created by Wa Renbo, a *nipa* in Weixi county (Yunnan 1999: 846-850). The syllabic script is only used by a small number of Lisu people in Weixi.

Despite the existence of typing methods for these two Lisu writing systems, the Lisu terms in this research are all transliterations from Lisu language into Mandarin pinyin. This choice was motivated by two reasons. Firstly, neither of the two Lisu input methods has obtained widespread usage or official recognition. Therefore, without specific software packages, these scripts often render poorly on digital platforms. Secondly, the contemporary socio-cultural landscape of China strongly leans towards Mandarin. Driven by influences from Han culture, education systems, tourism, and intangible cultural heritage management, Mandarin transliterations have become the norm with even the Lisu community adopting them. This trend is further solidified by the pervasive use of the pinyin system in contemporary Chinese studies and its widespread acceptance in international Chinese-language contexts.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Today when we meet,

Tonight when we get together.

Like fish meeting water,

Like bees meeting flowers.

In Habaluo village, at Xiong Lixian's home, a warm and lively gathering is taking place, briming with warmth and merriment. The air is perfumed with the tempting aroma of roasting meat, a feast prepared from the traditional slaughter of a pig. This joyful event is not merely a feast, but a celebration and partaking of the year's harvest with friends and relatives. As the party thrives amidst laughter, conversations, and the clinking of glasses in toasts, a song rises from the crowd. The melody—repetitive yet soothing—bounces off the walls, filling every nook and corner. The lyrics are not set in stone; they shift and evolve with each paragraph. Singers deftly weave various elements into the verse—animals, plants, locales, and landscapes. Each improvised line captures their joyous emptions upon meeting, painting a vivid picture of the participants' world. The lyrics of this song typify the characteristics of Lisu songs, using the metaphor drawn from nature and animals to express human experience. As the Lisu often say, "you cannot go without salt, and you cannot go without singing." This metaphorical approach to singing permeates Lisu everyday life: while doing chores, watching over livestock in the mountains, going for a walk, eating and drinking, gathering around a hearth for warmth, being alone, being with close acquaintances.

As this suggests, the Lisu people are skilled at capturing the essence of nature, animals, places, and events in life and incorporating them through the elements of music and dance to express emotions and describe events. In this way, those who listen to the songs, especially those living in the same community, can resonate with them based on their understanding of the local environment and life. Therefore, the music and dance of the Lisu people play a very important role in communication and interaction in everyday life, connecting individuals and the entire community, linking deceased ancestors with the living, and connecting past history with the present moment and with the natural world.

This thesis explores the musical, social, natural and emotional world of contemporary Lisu communities. I start in this introduction with an overview of the essential perspectives that will be elaborated upon in the following chapters: a detailed explanation of the thesis's purpose; a presentation of the Lisu people and their land, in particular the regions of Weixi and Lijiang, where I conducted most of my research; and theoretical notions relating to the study of relationship between human/non-human environments, indigenous knowledge and daily musical activity. By doing so, I hope to provide a foundation for the reader to better understand the context and significance of the research presented in the following chapters.

1.1 Aim

The overarching goal of this research is to contribute to the study of music as a means of interplay between humans, human society, and the environment. This thesis seeks to understand how music embody the connections between people, the environment, animals, and surrounding communities. These connections are important to our sense of being, knowing, and emotional expression. In the aftermath of the pandemic, there is an increasing push to rekindle our bond with the environment, especially as modern societies previously appeared to be drifting away from such connections. Urban life often lacks ecological richness, leading to a paradox where people are highly active on social media yet experience loneliness, lack support systems, and become increasingly individualistic. During a recent academic forum, scholar Xiang Biao introduced the concept of the "first 500 meters" in his speech.[1] He argues that the problem with urban development lies in an overemphasis on functionality at the expense of ecological richness. In response to this issue, Xiang suggests:

> Return to the first 500 meters…. Instead of focusing on power or capital, we should start with ourselves and each individual, examining the first 500 meters surrounding us that connect us to the larger world. The "first 500 meters" concept encourages us to pay attention to the details around us and start engaging in conversations with others. Initially, it may be nerve-wracking, and at times we might even need to be insincere, but these experiences could be valuable exercises for our social brains and potentially beneficial for our mental health.

Inspired by this concept, I find a resonance with my research topic and, I would like to expand the idea further in my own research context. We need not only return to the "first 500

[1] Xiang Biao's speech at the "City and Us: Crossing Borders" Sanlian Humanities Urban Spectrum Forum on October 29th 2022, He proposed the idea of the "first 500 meters" in his talk, titled "From Virtual Worlds to Real Social Connections: How Do We Rebuild Our Neighborhoods?" https://www.lifeweek.com.cn/article/187237. Accessed on 5 December 2022.

meters" of our communities but also to the environment. This entails paying attention to the plants, the sounds of insects and birds, the mountains and rivers around us, and making efforts to interact with them. Developing a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness with community and the environment around us, we can cultivate empathy, compassion, and cooperation, which are crucial for addressing the social and environmental challenges we face in today's world. Furthermore, this awareness can inspire us to seek more sustainable and harmonious ways of living, contributing to the overall well-being of our societies and the planet. Thus, the primary aim of this research is to investigate what insights and suggestions can be derived from musical and dance experiences that largely occur within the "first 500 meters" of community and the natural environment.

The second aim of this thesis is to explore and document the musical activities and knowledge of the Lisu people in their daily lives. With a long history of migration and extensive migration routes, the Lisu people's musical culture currently presents a highly diverse phenomenon. Most research within China's borders on the Lisu music culture follows a pattern of attempting to uniformly define Lisu music and dance, analysing them within a Eurocentric musical framework. However, in reality, regional variations and practices each have their unique characteristics, making forced definitions of limited universal significance. Therefore, when presenting my work on this topic, I aim to challenge default assumptions about the Lisu people as being culturally uniform. In doing so, I want to acknowledge their individuality and appreciate their experiences and knowledge without contributing to academic research that confines them to rigid cultural definitions or perpetuating stereotypes.

Although there are some studies on the music of the Lisu population residing in China, there is a notable lack of English-language scholarship on the subject. The majority of existing Chinese literature on the Lisu music in China focuses on the Nujiang region, specifically within the context of Christian music culture. In reality, the highly Christianized situation among the Lisu people in the Nujiang region is not as prevalent among the other two main Lisu-populated areas, Weixi and Lijiang. In these two regions, Lisu people living in the mountains still engage with more traditional music forms. Research on these forms is limited, as the remaining literature primarily concentrates on projects chosen for national intangible cultural heritage, cultural inheritors, or the Lisu elite cultural group, neglecting the musical experiences and daily activities of ordinary people. Consequently, there is a gap in basic knowledge that needs to be addressed.

1.2 The Lisu People

The Lisu are a trans-border ethnic group, a minority of the population of different contiguous states (Woodwell 2004), with a population of about 702,839 in China, and about 400,000 in Myanmar, Thailand, Northern India, and the Philippines (Figure 1.1). As this suggests, the Lisu have a long-distance migration history. They are generally regarded as originating in the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau area, in what is now China. Since the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD) they then migrated along the upper reaches of Yangtze, Mekong, and Salween rivers to different areas of Yunnan and Sichuan due to the impact of war (Lewis and Lewis 1998). In the last century, some Lisu additionally have crossed the borders into Myanmar, Thailand, and Northern India because of further social turbulence, to benefit from border trade or as participants in the transmission of Christianity, resulting in the current distribution of the Lisu people as a trans-border ethnic group (Hou and Zhang 2009).

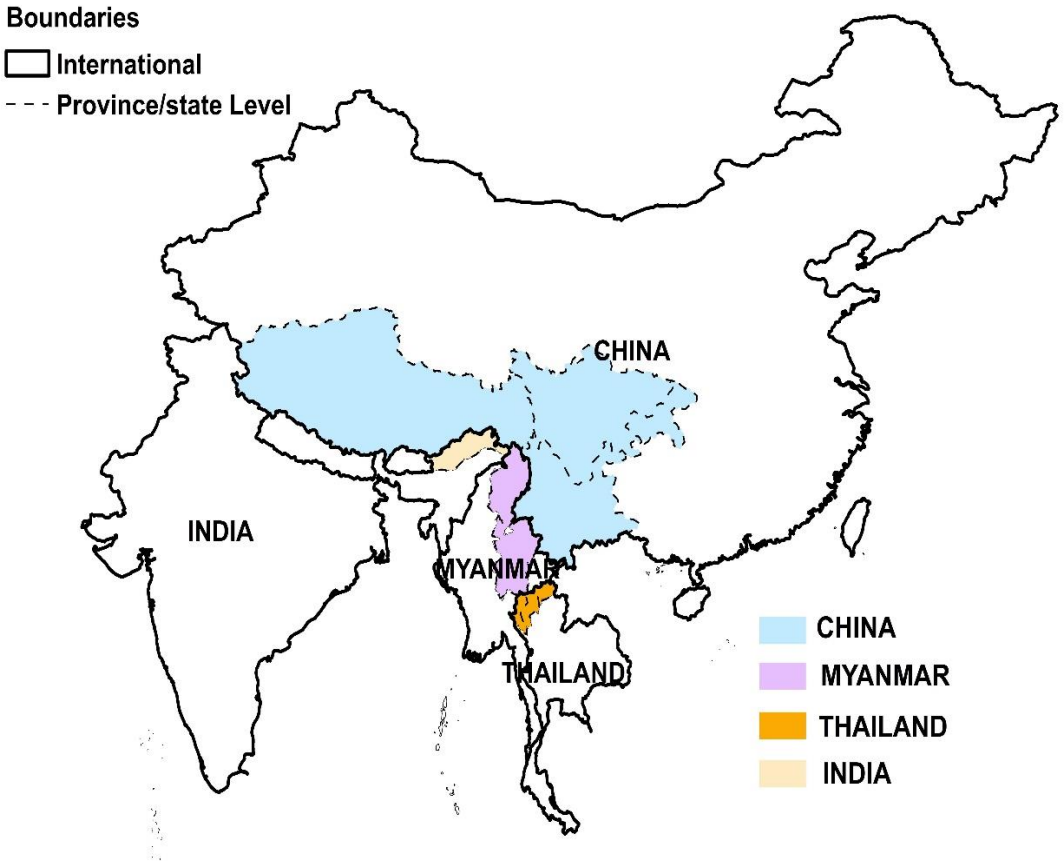


Figure 1.1 Map of Lisu distribution (Each colour represents the primary regions of Lisu population distribution in different countries), 2022. Base map from courtesy of Bai Si. Map redrawn by Keyi Liu.

Each differently located Lisu grouping now shares a sense of a homologous history and of shared historical memories. They are also subject into the fabric of the modern world, sharing contemporary experiences and challenges. In Yunnan, for instance, initiatives like the Poverty Alleviation Campaign, an ongoing governmental policy formally adopted in 2015 (but with roots going back to the 1980s; see further, Wang et al. 2019), have significantly impacted the Lisu people in areas such as education, housing, transportation, and livelihood. These implementations serve as a reminder of their engagement with contemporary life and the broader socio-economic dynamics. However, due to the different pathways they and the populations around them have followed in each locale, their current lives are not entirely identical. This diversity manifests itself in their performing arts, the instruments they used, and practices, with each region showcasing unique flair.

At the heart of the musical culture of the mountain—dwelling Lisu people is singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. These activities are enjoyable parts of their social life and allow them to express their emotions and feelings towards the environment and each other. The themes of their music often draw from mountains, rivers, interactions among humans and between humans, animals, and nature, as well as activities like hunting, herding, and gathering. For instance, and as explored in Chapter 4, understanding the Lisu instrument ensemble dance called "*waqi*" requires a knowledge not only of the Lisu instrument *qiben*'s tuning and the origin of the dance steps but also of various bird calls and the steps and methods of Lisu traditional weaving. Lisu songs and dances also serve as a means of preserving their endangered language and shaping their ethnic identity (Ikuta 2022: 2). Locals believe that these traditional musical practices allow them to represent their unique way of life, distinguishing them from other surrounding ethnic minorities (Yu Yongxing, personal conversation, 6 April 2021).

1.3 Entering the Field

1.3.1 Weixi County and Lijiang City

Initially, I planned to explore Lisu music as a transnational expression of the contrasting multi-ethnic areas where it is found, with a particular focus on China and Myanmar and on the dynamics of cross-border and cross-ethnic communication. However, with the Covid-19 epidemic raging since early 2020, I was unable to return to Myanmar for further fieldwork. Although I previously spent some time exploring the Lisu in Myitkyina, Myanmar in

September 2019, the entire trip took only one month, and the data I collected was insufficient to complete my original plan. As a result, my research has focused on Lisu music in Yunnan, China and its internal diversities. At the time, China was implementing strict pandemic prevention measures. I was fortunate that my fieldwork was mainly in mountainous areas, where the impact was relatively low.

My fieldwork occurred largely in the mountainous of Lijiang and Weixi Lisu Autonomous County where I stayed for around 11 months, following one month spent previously in Nujiang Lisu autonomous prefecture in 2019. Indeed, Nujiang, as the largest Lisu settlement, has always been a representative location for Lisu scholars and journalists seeking to learn more about Lisu culture. Thus, in terms of the volume of literature, most of the limited research on the Lisu people is concentrated in this area. Due to the close proximity of Nujiang State to Myanmar and its strong Christian influence, most Lisu there have chosen to become Christian (Arrington 2015: 141). Their majority musical activities are dominated by Han mainstream and Christian music, rather than by Lisu traditional music. A lot of academics have conducted research and studies on this topic. Much less information is available on indigenous Lisu music culture, especially that of non-elite groups and as found in everyday musical scenes. In order to address my research questions more specifically, I devoted more time and energy to mountain area of Lijiang and Weixi, two places that preserve more diverse elements of traditional Lisu music culture but are rarely visited due to the difficulties of carrying out fieldwork.

According to the 2010 census, there were 702,839 Chinese Lisu.[2] After Nujiang, Lijiang has the second-largest Lisu population, with a population of 115,730. Diqing Prefecture which includes Weixi County, located in northeastern Yunnan, is the third largest grouping, with a population of 87,713 people in 2012 (Weixixian Tongjiju, 2013), and Weixi County is important in its own right as the only autonomous county where the Lisu form the majority.[3]

Before the formation of the current administrative divisions were established after the founding of the People's Republic of China, Lisu people, who lived in remote mountainous areas far from the ruling powers, appear not to have been particularly sensitive to

[2] Guowuyuan Renkou Pucha Bangongshi, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm, 13 March 2023. The seventh census was carried out in 2020 but results are yet to be published. Meanwhile, from the 2021 China Statistical Yearbook (stats.gov.cn, accessed 13 March 2023) gives a total of 762,996 Lisu population.
[3] Nujiang's census result appears at: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/CO6Zpc4PKuQQkB2IGUDFRg; Lijiang City's data is at https://www.cnstats.org/rkpc/201112/ljs-2010-gpofa.html; Diqing's statistics are at https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/r5Uu3MzzoV8KwTBTI8yoyg, all accessed 13 March 2023.

administrative divisions. Instead, those towering peaks and expansive rivers became the primary reference points for the Lisu to define their location. As I found in my interviews, and especially among the older generation, this way of referring to locations is still used today.

This practice, rooted in the deep-seated history. About 40 million years ago, the collision of the Indian subcontinent plate with the Eurasian plate resulted in the dramatic crushing, uplifting, and cutting of the mountain ranges in this region (Molnar 1977: 35; see Figure 1.2 below). High mountains and large rivers alternately spread out, forming a landscape of towering peaks and deep valleys, with mountains and rivers running parallel. This has obstructed the east-west mountain and transport routes, hence the name Hengduan shan mai (Hengduan Mountain Range). This region, known as the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas (San Jiang Bing Liu), was inscribed on the World Heritage Site status in 2003.[4]

From left to right, this region includes the drainage basins of the upper reaches of the Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze rivers, known in China as the Nu, Lancang, and Jinsha rivers respectively. However, these rivers are not navigable in this area due to their narrowness and rapid currents, and they are surrounded by large mountain ranges. The Gaoligong Mountains lie on the west bank of the Nujiang River, while the Biluo Snow Mountains lie between the Nujiang and Lancang rivers. The area between the Lancang and Jinsha rivers is Yun Ling, which includes notable mountain ranges such as Yulong Snow Mountain and Haba Snow Mountain. The average elevation of these mountain ranges is over 3,000 metres above sea level. Despite the Lisu people using a unique water transportation method involving ziplines (see further in Tao 2011: 234-6), east-west travel has been challenging for people living in this region to travel in an east-west direction, and many parts of the area remain remote and inaccessible to this day.

[4] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1083/, accessed 1November 2022.

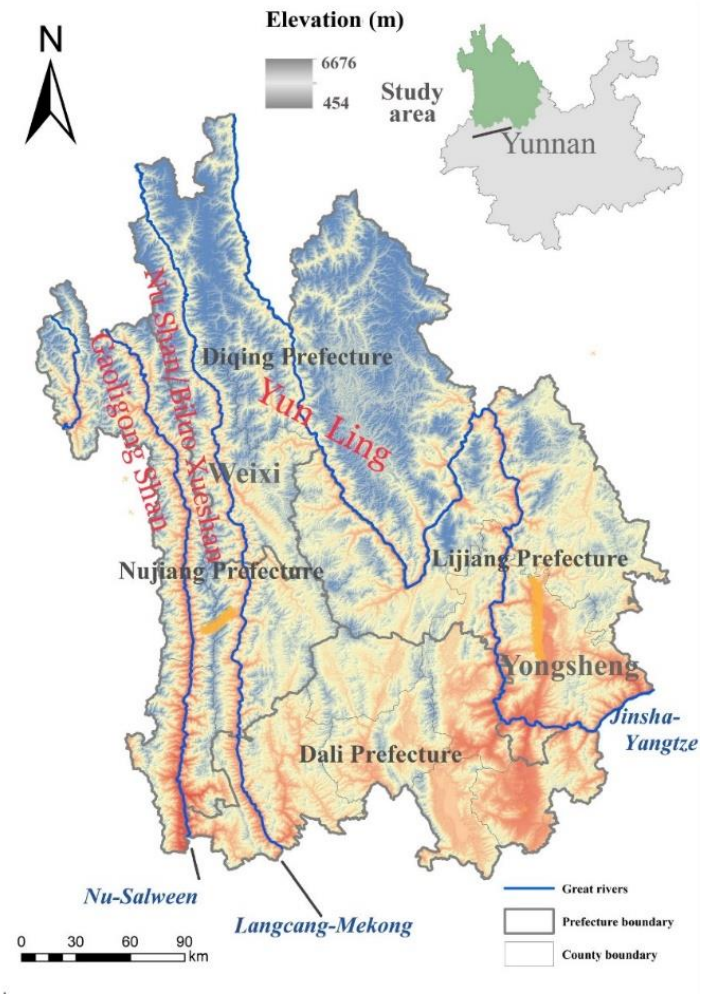


Figure 1.2 Names of the mountains and rivers in the land where the Lisu people live, 2022. Base map from courtesy of Bai Si. Map redrawn by Keyi Liu.

Although this area is known for its many high mountains, hidden among these mountain ranges are some small plains, which geographers call intramountainous basins, and locals refer to as “ba zi” (dams). Traveling from one basin to another usually requires crossing mountains, and even with modern roads, the journey may take four to five hours by car. In the past, it could take several days. These small basins are often irrigated by rivers, such as the San Chuan Ba in Lijiang. Interestingly, you rarely find Lisu people living in these basins. I recall a time when I drove from Lijiang to Liming Township in Yulong County with the president of the Lijiang Lisu Culture Research Association to attend a traditional Lisu wedding. As we passed a large plain with a river, rice fields, and clusters of low houses along the river, I momentarily forgot that I was in a high-altitude area with an average elevation of 3,000 meters, feeling as if I had returned to my hometown in the southern Jiangnan region.

> Look, those houses mostly belong to the Yi and Naxi people. They sure know how to pick a location, unlike us, who not only choose to live in the mountains but also specifically select high-altitude areas. There is an old Lisu saying: "If you're afraid of hunger, live at the foot of the mountain; if you are afraid of death, live on the mountaintop." There's also a saying here "If you want to be free, live on top of a mountain". … In the past, life was turbulent, and living at the foot of the mountain presented many challenges, punctuated with raids banditry, tribal enemies, and government authorities. (He Wenwin, personal conversation, 3 November 2020)

Most Lisu people in this region live in relatively isolated mountaintop environments with limited access to transportation and information. The Lisu people's migration routes along different rivers, the east-west communication barrier created by the Hengduan Mountains, and their preference for living on mountaintops away from crowds are all important factors contributing to the diversity of Lisu culture. I recognise that there will naturally be both similarities and differences in the Lisu culture. My intention is to avoid superficial comparisons and focus on highlighting the rich diversity within these communities and identities, and to explore the significant social dynamics that shape each community's unique cultural characteristics.

1.3.2 A Journey to Lijiang Mountain Area

I arrived in Lijiang at the end of September 2020 to begin my long-term field studies. Famed for its UNESCO Heritage Site, the Old Town of Lijiang, this city is a bustling tourist hub and a vibrant mosaic of diverse ethnic cultures. In the city, this melting pot of ethnic cultures intertwines seamlessly with a tourist industry, creating a blend of traditions and modernity. Lijiang, being the second-largest concentration of the Lisu people in China, is primarily a home to the Naxi people (see further in Chapter 1). Most of the Lisu live in the mountainous areas of the four counties and one neighbouring town called Hutiaoxia surrounding Lijiang city (Figure 1.3). Life in the mountain areas presents a stark contrast to city, with inhabitants leading simple, unpretentious lifestyles.



Figure 1.3 Map of Lijiang, 2023. Drawn by Keyi Liu

To better explore and understand the diversity of the Lisu culture, my journey took me on a winding path through several Lisu villages situated along the Jinsha river. As a popular tourist destination, Lijiang is easily accessible with an airport and high-speed railway station. However, my transport options ended there. As soon as I left the city boundaries, I found myself relying mostly on hitching a lift with contacts. For those dwelling in these mountains, hitching lifts is often the most convenient means of transportation in a context without public transportation. Travellers either count on the kindness of relatives and friends traveling between areas or, if luck permits, catch rides with private cars running irregularly between urban and rural areas. Another inconvenience I faced was the lack of accommodation options in the mountainous areas, except for a few developed scenic spots. Considering these two logistical challenges, two weeks after arriving in Lijiang, I decided to join the Lijiang Lisu Culture Research Association as a volunteer. In this capacity, I not only assisted with the investigation, research, and promotion of Lisu culture but also had a chance to integrate more deeply with local communities.

The Lijiang Lisu Culture Research Association is a non-governmental organisation (NGO), voluntarily formed by a group of Lisu people, especially elites, who are passionate about preserving their culture. In fact, each member has their own full-time job and usually contributes to the research association when they have spare time. The balanced workload

within the organization gave me sufficient time to carry out my own research while also being part of the team. The association served as an effective platform for establishing connections with other Lisu individuals who cherish their culture, hailing from different towns and villages. These relationships not only eased my travel but also provided solutions to my accommodation concerns. From September to early March of the following year, I undertook journeys to Lisu villages situated in the mountainous areas spanning four counties along the Jinsha River. The villages included Liguang Village in Liming Township of Yulong County, Yantou Village in Songping Township of Yongsheng County, Laguhe Village in Tongda Township of Hua Ping County, and Haibaluo Village at the foot of Haba Snow Mountain in Hutiaoxia Town.

Through my investigations, I discovered an interesting diversity among these villages located along the Jinsha River. Despite all being Lisu settlements, the tunes and dances they performed, the stories they told, even their accents and attire, manifested distinctive features unique to each village. The locals offered one interesting explanation for this variety—the winding path of the Jinsha River (Figure 1.4). Serving as the upper course of the Yangtze River, it measures over 2300 kilometres long, despite traveling a straight-line distance of merely 500 kilometres between its two ends—Batang river mouth and Yibin Min river mouth. Consequently, villages that appear relatively close in terms of direct distance could be far apart in terms of actual travel distance.



Figure 1.4 One of the bends in the Jinsha River. Photo by Keyi Liu.

It is worth noting that my all my fieldwork took place during the outbreak of the pandemic. The Chinese government implemented a strict COVID zero policy, which severely restricted the activities of the Lisu people, and I also faced challenges. Travel inconveniences and policy changes resulted in lots of missed observation opportunities, such as the cancellation of the annual Lisu Kuoshi festival (Lisu New Year, normally held in late December). However, my main activities took place in the safer mountain areas, where there were fewer restrictions and less oversight. In the words of one Lisu consultant, "There are not many people here and the wind is strong in the mountains. Any virus would be blown away by the wind" (Xiong Lixian, personal conversation, Haiboluo Village, 17 January 2021). On a more positive note, I was able to observe how the Lisu singers adapted during the pandemic, combining their strengths, external conditions, and political restrictions to forge a unique path (see Chapter 2).

During this period, through many visits and interviews in Lijiang area, I gained a deeper understanding of the diverse culture of the Lisu people and refined my research directions (as mentioned earlier, the outbreak of the pandemic had put my earlier cross-border plan into crisis). However, I still needed to conduct in-depth research to achieve both breadth and depth in my fieldwork within the limited conditions. I therefore looked for a village ideally in the Weixi area that was relatively isolated from urban influence and was occupied only by Lisu people. My work in urban areas led me to contact Li Guiming who kindly agreed that I could stay in his family home in Lari Village, Jishuitan Group, Baohetown, Weixi County, where I stayed from early March until the end of August 2021.This village is situated roughly 300km to the northwest of Lijiang's city centre.

1.3.3 A Journey to Weixi

Weixi is the only Lisu autonomous county in China (Figure 1.5). It is situated in the northwest of Yunnan and bordered by Tibet to the north, Dali to the south, the Jinsha River to the east and the Nujiang River to the west. According to the 2019 Weixi County Statistical Report, there are 27 ethnic minorities represented in the 157,279 total population, including Lisu, Tibetan, Naxi, Yi, and Miao, with Lisu accounting for 57.46% and Tibetans accounting for 8.19%.

Weixi is not only a significant concentration of the Lisu population, but it is also regarded by many Lisu consultants, including those working in Lisu culture-related fields outside the

Weixi region, as a place where traditional Lisu culture is relatively authentic, rich, and well-preserved. It is interesting to note that they believed the Lisu people who live in Weixi are not as heavily influenced by Christianity as those in the Nujiang region, nor are they as strongly affected by the tourism industry and surrounding ethnic minorities as those in the Lijiang region. Although the music culture of Weixi may not enjoy as high a profile as those in other regions, certain characteristics of its musical traditions resonate with the Lisu people, giving them a sense of belonging (Li Wenlin, personal interview, Liming town, 6 January 2021).

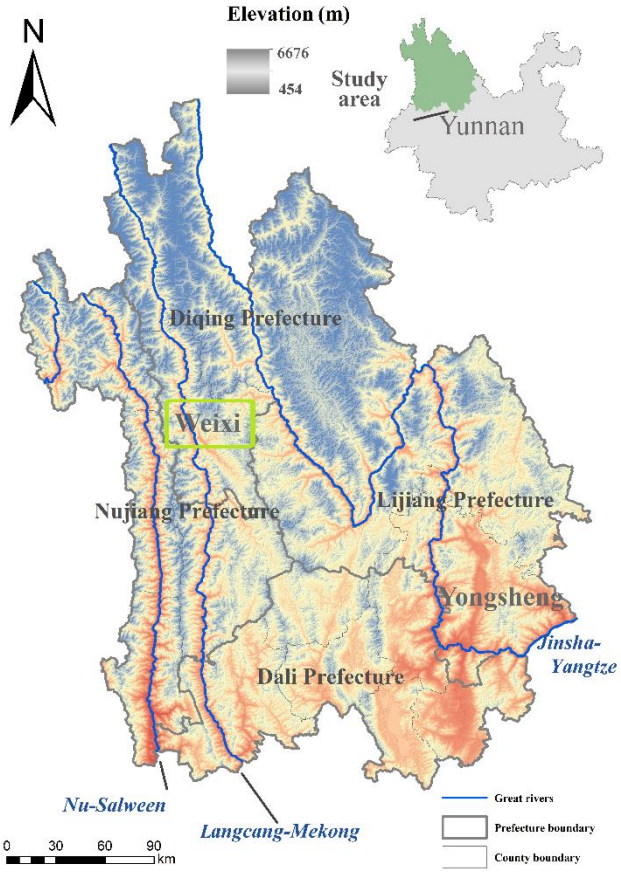


Figure 1.5 The map of Weixi county, 2022. Base map from courtesy of Bai Si, and redrawn by Keyi Liu.

What makes this place so special? Firstly, it may have something to do with its geographical location. As the map shows, Weixi is located in the heart of the Hengduan Mountains, surrounded by plateaus to the east, west and north. The most convenient route to get to here is from Lijiang or Dali. This relatively isolated living environment and poor transport may be one of the reasons why traditional culture is better preserved there. Secondly, as the only Lisu

autonomous county, Weixi receives greater support from the government toward Lisu cultural projects as compared to Lijiang (where the Naxi are the dominant group).

My journeys to Weixi usually started from Lijiang, where I could choose to take a coach from the bus station or find a private car. Coaches typically ran once a day, but they take a longer, older route, making the journey in about 8 hours. Private cars could travel on the new highway that opened in early 2021, usually reaching Weixi in about 3.5 hours. However, private cars required carpooling, and whether I could successfully carpool depended on my luck. Otherwise, I might have had to spend four times the regular price to charter a car to get there.

The county of Weixi is small, and the vast majority of Lisu people here live in villages in the surrounding mountains at an average altitude of 3,000 meters. These villages are inaccessible by public transport. Without the guidance of someone who has lived in the area for many years, I would easily become lost, as most of the villages cannot be found on maps, and there are no clear routes. The village where I stayed, Jishuitang in Lari Village, home to Li Guiming (Figure 1.6), is located in a northwest direction, not too far from Weixi county town. It has a population of over 100 people. After driving about 12km along the G215 highway, the road takes a left turn and winds uphill for about 20 minutes to reach the village. This locale can be characterized as an ethnically homogenous Lisu enclave, with the community composition almost exclusively consisting of Lisu families, devoid of any significant representation from other ethnic groups.



Figure 1.6 Jishuitang Group, Jishuitang, Lari Village, Weixi County, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

In the village today, while the majority of buildings are modern concrete houses, the Lisu people primarily use them for sleeping. Every family, however, still retains their traditional *muleng* house, because of their need for fire pits. This kind of house is the heart of daily life, where people cook, boil tea, and keep warm. Typically, *Muleng* house are made of wood and bamboo materials (Figure 1.7). In the past, traditional houses were often built on stilts to keep the living areas above ground. This architectural choice had multiple benefits, such as flood protection and offering space for livestock beneath the living quarters. Under the influence of recent poverty alleviation policies, many of these *muleng* house have been renovated, including changes like eliminating the structure where people lived above, and livestock were kept below. These modifications aim to enhance the living conditions for the Lisu, with a strong emphasis on cleanliness and sanitation.



Figure 1.7 Lisu muleng house of Li Guiming in Jishuitang Village, Weixi County, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

There was no grocery in the many villages like Jishuitang, let alone a hotel or guesthouse. This raises the question, how do people living in these villages buy things? In fact, most Lisu people, especially the middle-aged and elderly, lead relatively simple lives, and the villages are mostly self-sufficient. In recent years, as a result of poverty alleviation policies (see more in Chapter 1), some villages with better geographical conditions have started to grow cash crops such as sticky yams, lilies, traditional Chinese medicine herbs, and dried fruits. Lari

village is located near the top of the mountain and does not have favourable conditions for agriculture. The villagers here rely mainly on growing corn and raising livestock for their sustenance. Based on information provided by the village committee's chairperson, the average per capita income of farmers in the year 2019 was quantified at 3,750 Chinese Yuan (Li Ronghua, personal interview, Jishuitang, Lari village, 13 May 2021). To facilitate comprehension within a European context, this figure equates to approximately 525 Euros, calculated using an exchange rate of 0.14 Euros per Chinese Yuan. [5]

When villagers need to buy other items, they usually walk down the mountain to the secondary roads and wait for a farm vehicle to take them to shops in the county town, paying a fee of 5 or 10 yuan (approx. 0.7 or 1.4 EUR) depending on the distance. Of course, wealthier households may have motorcycles or cars. Alternatively, they wait for farm vehicles to come to the village at uncertain times to sell fruits, vegetables, and snacks. These vehicles are equipped with a loudspeaker that plays music while repeatedly announcing, "Vegetables and fruits for sale, 3 jin for 10 yuan, 3 jin for 10 yuan."[6] Hearing the music in the village was one of my happiest moments. I would usually rush to the entrance of the village, buy some food items not available in the village like tofu, oranges, and snacks, and share them with the family I was staying with.

1.4 Challenges in the Field

Moving beyond the logistical hurdles of conducting fieldwork discussed earlier, the more complex challenges I grappled with concerned the intellectual and cultural aspects of research Lisu music culture. Firstly, a glaring discrepancy exists between the existing literature and materials on Lisu music culture and the realities I encountered in the field. Most of the writings and concepts on Lisu music culture come from non-Lisu music specialists. These documents emphasise "average" and "typical" musical practices and knowledge. The starting point is to generalise and present the musical characteristics of the Lisu people, but the

[5] It is imperative to note that this exchange rate is illustrative and should be updated with the current rate for accurate contemporary conversion. This explanation applies to all currency references in this thesis.
[6] Jin (斤) is a Chinese unit of weight, with 1 jin roughly equal to 500 grams or 1.1 pounds. Yuan (元) is the basic unit of the Chinese currency, also known as Renminbi (RMB). You can get 3 jin (approximately 1.5 kg or 3.3 pounds) of a product for the price of 10 yuan (approx. 1.4 EUR).

overall musical culture of the Lisu people presents a diverse landscape, making it difficult for any single statement to encompass the characteristics of the entire Lisu ethnic group. There is also a lack of explanation and definition on how "typical" was determined in any one case. For example, according to the available literature, scholars have followed a relatively uniform statement in classifying Lisu songs into *mugua*, *youyi*, and *baishi* (Zhao 1989 and 1997). This is based on the results of a survey conducted by a central research team in the Nujiang region in the early 1950s, and has been used ever since. Yet, this fails to reflect the current reality which is that Lisu communities in Weixi and Lijiang regions rarely mention *youyi* and *baishi*.

Secondly, while many appeared proficient in their practices and musical capabilities to me, the answers I frequently received during my interviews and interactions with the majority of the Lisu people were along the lines of "I don't know how to answer it," "It has just been passed down from generation to generation," or "I never really thought about it." I came to term this the "State of Unknowing." Within this context, there are some reasons that there are differences in the understanding and perception of music and its associated concepts between both me and Lisu people. Also, there are disparities rooted in the different terminologies, concepts, and linguistic nuances of our respective languages. Beyond these reasons, one might wonder if there were other underlying factors?

In this situation, I was often left to seek answers on my own. So much so that towards the end of my fieldwork, a playful thought arose "It seems I could interview myself now!" I believe many scholars might have encountered a similar situation. For instance, Timothy Rice experienced this during his fieldwork in Bulgaria. When he found that his consultant couldn't thoroughly explain certain aspects, Rice took the initiative to learn the *gaidar*. During this learning journey, he grappled with challenges and frustrations. However, it was through this intensive exploration and reflection that he finally decoded the technique of playing the instrument, illuminating the enigma of the bagpiper's fingers. This experience deepened his understanding and enabled him to articulate these insights both to himself and to others (Rice 2008: 50-2).

In such situations, a researcher's interpretation and personal journey become pivotal. Throughout my fieldwork, I constantly pondered on how to experience this culture authentically and how to convey my insights in a way that would closely align with what the Lisu people intended to express.

Thirdly, the varying interpretations of musical culture within the Lisu community posed an additional challenge. Some interpretations of musical culture were widely disseminated and acknowledged within the Lisu community, and these were relatively straightforward to document. However, quite often, interpretations were localized or individualistic in nature. They seem to stem from ongoing explorative efforts based on personal or communal experiences. These practices even bear the potential to be perpetually evolving, and their full depths may never be completely fathomed.

These circumstances and reflections bring forth questions: given the various forms and societal functions of the Lisu music culture, how can we, under a commitment to justice, respect for cultural diversity, and an open attitude to equal dialogue, elucidate the multifaceted nature of Lisu music culture and safeguard the authenticity and autonomy of its unique cultural expressions?

In practice, I found it challenging to engage in a fully equal dialogue between academic and Lisu music epistemologies, even without considering my status as an outsider. One reason for this is that much of the encounter between Lisu music and academic knowledge takes place through written texts, and because the Lisu have only a spoken language, all written documents are in Chinese. This means any concept must inevitably be translated in order to be written down and that Lisu concepts inevitably acquire a Chinese framework by being written into that language. This illustrates how the nature of academic knowledge building is inherently oppressive and colonial (Dei and Asgharzadeh 2001: 299). Another reason is that institutional affiliations and funding for Lisu music culture research projects are at least partly influenced by national interests and policies, which has led to imbalances in the dialogue. Therefore, the pursuit of an equal and mutually enriching conversation, rather than the simplistic labelling of their music culture knowledge, remains an aspiration to be realised. In this process of exploration, many ethnomusicologists are dedicated to addressing this issue.

1.5 Five Guiding Perspectives on My Research

A considerable portion of ethnomusicological studies on Indigenous populations centre on their music, culture, and traditions. This domain acknowledges the profound cultural heritage

and diversity among these communities, stressing the necessity to comprehend and respect their unique musical expressions, practices, and beliefs. Ethnomusicologists often work intimately with Indigenous communities, striving to document, preserve, and promote their musical heritage. At the same time, they respect and support the communities' pursuits of cultural sovereignty and self-determination. The perspectives in these studies, which deal with universality of music, individuality, everyday music descriptions, ecological factors, and experiences, provided a launching pad for my exploration.

1.5.1 Universality and Definition of Music

Before exploring how to write about Lisu culture, I will first explore what the concept of "music" is among the Lisu people. Alan Merriam points out that some societies may not possess an equivalent notion to what Westerns (and contemporary Han Chinese) call "music," and the application of such a concept might be unsuitable or misleading in their context (1977: 190). Thus, it is necessary to begin by asking what concept of "music" exists for the Lisu people, if there is one at all? Theis seemingly simple question is not easy to answer even though I have had many years of music training in both China and the West. As Kenneth Gourlay notes, "formal musical training broadened one's outlook and added to one's experience, but did little to change concepts of music" (1984: 30).

Over the years, this challenge had led a number of scholars to reflect on the universality and definition of music. Klaus Wachsmann, for instance, proposed three methods: analysing the relationship between psyche and sound; employing a checklist approach to identify unifying characteristics, hinting at an unending quest; and relying on cultural similarity, which implies using our own cultural understanding of music to recognize "music" in other cultures (1971: 382-384). Yet, Kenneth Gourlay placed emphasis on non-industrial societies akin to the Lisu people, contending that we should not presuppose that "music" as we know it is a universal concept. Instead, he advocates that we consider the possibility that there is a more comprehensive, universal form of expression that includes various aspects such as musical sound, dance, drama, and ritual. This form of expression is not limited to an elite minority but belongs to the whole community and is used on occasions of heightened emotion when speech is inadequate (1984: 33-36).

In line with Gourlay's proposition, my interactions with the Lisu people revealed that their understanding of music is holistic and intricately intertwined with their cultural and societal

fabric. To the Lisu people, music extends beyond the confines of sound and melody. It intimately connects them to the natural environment, everyday life, social interactions, and spiritual beliefs. Apart from being an art form, Lisu music also serves as a non-written language, a vehicle for historical transmission, an educational tool, a conduit for rituals, and a means of resolving disputes. In essence, Lisu music's multifaceted nature reflects its social and cultural significance within the Lisu society.

1.5.2 The Individual

The field of ethnomusicology has traditionally been geared towards shared cultural experiences and communities. For instance, research on Lisu so far was largely based on government-sponsored social surveys and the "culture average" descriptions provided by specialist musicianship as a representational stance (see Chapter 2). However, this approach has questioned by many more and more scholars, including Jonathan Stock, who raised two concerns: first, the use of the "culture average" can lead to overgeneralization and a lack of appreciation of diversity within the culture; second, that it is unrealistic for authors to assume a privileged, all-knowing perspective, as no one can fully understand or access all aspects of a culture (2001: 12-3). In response to these concerns, there has been a gradual shift towards individual-cantered narratives in recent decades. More scholars are recognizing the significance of individuality and uniqueness within musical communities. Jesse Ruskin and Timothy Rice propose four types of individual in their musical ethnographies: (1) innovators in a tradition; (2) key figures who occupy important roles in a musical culture; (3) ordinary or typical individuals; and (4) normally anonymous audience members and others who play a role in music production, dissemination, and reception (2012: 304).

This shift reflects broader trends in the social sciences and humanities towards acknowledging individual agency and the importance of personal experiences and perspectives. It also challenges the traditional notion of culture as a homogeneous entity, instead presenting it as a mosaic of individual decisions, evaluations, actions, and interactions. In writing this thesis, I sought to reflect this shift by considering not only the music itself, but also the individuals who create, perform, and listen to it. This encompasses a diverse range of individuals: from exceptional musicians, such as Lisu singers and bearers of intangible cultural heritage to music enthusiasts who have a passion for singing or dancing. In addition, ordinary individuals, and those working in non-governmental organizations or

government settings, playing a role in cultural dissemination, have also been included. This approach recognizes the Lisu not merely as a minority group, but as active participants in the global space shared by all humanity, with their own unique musical paths and ambitions. It acknowledges the social, economic, and political conditions that sometimes place them at a disadvantage, while also highlighting their agency in shaping their music culture. Moreover, I also acknowledge my role as a researcher through showing reflexivity as to how my presence, background, and perspectives inherently influenced the representation of their culture.

1.5.3 Everyday Music

Indeed, a number of scholars have ventured into exploring the everyday engagement with and listening to music, as well as the expanded scope of sonic elements. Building on these foundations, Jonathan Stock has brought the dimension of ethics and morality into the dialogue, and propose a comprehensive Five-Part Model for New Research into Music in Everyday Life:

1. Greater interest in the full range of everyday musical engagements
2. An expanded frame of sonic reference extending into sound, noise, and silence
3. Expanded global coverage and relevance, particularly beyond what may be overrepresented middle-class, urban Western settings
4. Greater exploration of the interplay of the aesthetic and creative characteristics of music making with the surrounding social emplacements and usages
5. A rise in research directly designed to confront significant societal challenges and yield benefits for subaltern group

(Stock 2021: 52)

This model seems to resonate deeply with the current shifts in ethnomusicology towards a more inclusive, participant-cantered research paradigm that emphasizes the importance of social context and actively works to challenge power imbalances. In fact, this framework emphasizes the need to understand the perspectives of the people being studied, respecting the complexity of their musical experiences while striving to understand music within its broader social and cultural context.

In the chapters that follow I explore a way that allows Lisu to express themselves to the greatest extent possible to depict a musical world based on the Lisu aesthetic. With this in mind, I quote their original words as much as I can, as well as repeatedly checking with them

as to whether my understanding aligns with their intended expression. This commitment to privileging Lisu perspectives has led me to explore the expanded sonic environment that forms their auditory world, a landscape that extends beyond music to encompass sounds, noise, and silence. Simultaneously, I seek to situate Lisu music within its social context, exploring its functionality and the ways it both shapes and is shaped by its surroundings. In interpreting Lisu music, I strive to understand it within the framework of the Lisu's own worldview, acknowledging the cultural specificities that shape their musical practices. Throughout this process, I have remained mindful of the potential benefits of my research for the local community. This includes collaborating with local entities or governments to apply for projects aimed at supporting the community, thereby ensuring that the outcomes of my research extend beyond academic insights and contribute to tangible improvements in the local context.

1.5.4 Music, Nature and Environment

The exploration of the relationship between music and the natural world has emerged as a prominent topic over the past few decades. Since the 1980s, ethnomusicologists conducting fieldwork in diverse locations have provided descriptive and analytical material on human sound-related behaviours in relation to geophysical and biological landscapes. This has laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding of how music and sound interact with the natural world. One of the most widely cited work from this period is Steven Feld's study of sound and social systems of the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea. His work explores the birds, myths, cosmology, and how they intertwine with poetry, songs, and laments. He further elucidates how these elements form the local ecology of "sounds in the forest" (Feld 2012).

This seminal work has resonated with other ethnographers in subsequent decades, inspiring new research on sound, music, non-human beings, and environment. For instance, some research delves into the representation of mythic animals' voices or other spiritual entities in first-person form (Keeling 2012). Additionally, there is considerable exploration of dance in relation to animals. Hiroko Ikuta analyse motion dance songs about hunting, focusing on how Yupiget and Iñupiat cultures enact relationships with non-human beings, and identifies four distinct categories of perspectives utilized in these dances concerning relationships with animals (Ikuta 2011). Furthermore, there has been an exploration of how music becomes an integral part of cultural responses to environmental issues. Discussions have focused on music's role in raising awareness about ecological crises and its effectiveness as a tool for environmental communication (Guy 2009). These studies extend to examining the

relationship between music and physical spaces in the natural world, human engagement with these soundscapes (Impey 2006), as well as the connection between musical instruments and natural world materials (Gibson 2019).

These studies observe human behavioural patterns, particularly those related to terrain and biological entities, revealing the significance of sound and materiality for members of indigenous communities. These communities, such as the Lisu people, lean heavily on traditional ecological knowledge, which can be defined as "a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment" (Loovers 2020: 7–8). Building upon such a research context, the forthcoming chapters delve into the relationship between the Lisu people and nature environment. This exploration includes an examination of how the Lisu derive inspiration for their music and dance from various elements of nature, notably animals such as birds and sheep. Additionally, attention will be given to their engagement with and descriptions of natural soundscapes, such as the rustling of leaves, mountain echoes, and the sounds carried by the wind. Attention is also directed towards their application of and experience with natural materials in the creation of their musical instruments. This examination extends to a discussion on how the Lisu community perceives and reacts to the impact of declining biodiversity on their music and dance traditions. These elements – the soundscapes, the use of natural materials, and the cultural implications of environmental changes – are integral to understanding the Lisu musical expression and how it reflects their deep connection with the natural world.

1.5.5 Experience

There is a lot of apparently non-academic detail in this thesis, such as my personal feelings and the food, clothing, and housing of the Lisu people, which might appear to have very little to do with music. But in fact, music and food, clothing, and housing are completely inseparable in the Lisu cultural context. The concept of music was more like a medium that integrated their lives, rather than a separate domain of music itself. As Kay Shelemay has argued, sometimes the ethnomusicologist may ignore seemingly mundane details that could reveal nuanced insights about how they arrived at an interpretation of their materials (Shelemay 2020: 10) and this is what I have tried to avoid here by providing immersive descriptions that show how meanings emerged or were co-created in participatory activity.

Building on this foundation, my journey with the Lisu community in the mountain area was one of deep immersion. I didn't just observe; I lived their music, dance, and daily routines. I worked alongside them in the fields, cared for their animals, gathered firewood, and participated in communal cooking. Beyond these activities, I embraced and enjoyed conversations and stories about minutiae of life that appeared unrelated to music but were interesting nevertheless. For example, I became fascinated by the Lisu people's farming methods. How is the house of the next-door neighbour coming along? How did the harvest go? Is sister-in-law's pregnancy doing well? Through these interactions, I unexpectedly discovered songs about building house, dances related to labour, and ancient tunes about childbirth and child-rearing.

As time progressed, a subtle transformation began to unfold within me. My thoughts and way of acting started aligning more with the Lisu way of Life. This shift became evident in my reflections and writings Questions that once perplexed me now seemed clearer, as if I could explain them to both to myself and others (see further Rice 2008: 51). My dialogues with consultants became more resonant, highlighting our growing mutual understanding. Although I previously mentioned in jest, "It seems I could interview myself now!", it truly reflects the deep synchronicity I felt with them. Drawing from this rich tapestry of experiences, I believe that effective communication and collaboration between mainstream researchers and indigenous knowledge holders can occur when individuals are open to personal transformation, recognizing the value of alternative ways of understanding the world and integrating them into their own perspectives. This type of exchange can enrich both indigenous and mainstream knowledge, fostering a more inclusive and holistic understanding of the world around us.

Chapter 2 Knowing Lisu People, Society, and Music

This chapter embarks on a comprehensive journey through Lisu society. In the initial three of sections of this chapter, I explore the Lisu from the perspectives of history, sociology, anthropology, economics, etc, aiming to set the stage for understanding Lisu music and dance in a larger social context and value system. I discuss an array of subjects, including Lisu naming conventions, ancestral origins, migratory paths and history, and geographical locations, as well as the opportunities and challenges the Lisu face in the contemporary Chinese landscape, including their living and working conditions, political influences, and cultural circumstances. I place a primary focus on the Weixi and Lijiang regions—the central areas of this research. In the fourth section of this chapter, I offer a critical review of extant academic literature pertinent to Lisu music, thereby further creating a necessary background and context of this thesis topic in existing research.

2.1 Who are the Lisu?

2.1.1 Personalities of the Lisu

The term "Lisu" is first mentioned in the *Barbarian Book* (*Man Shu*) (Fan 1998 [863]: volume 4), which states that "the two surnames of the Lisu tribe, Lei tribe and the Meng tribe, both lived in the three districts east and west of the Daideng City of Mangbu" (now Mianning County, Sichuan Province). The Lisu people, within a global context, have been referred to by a multitude of names given by outsiders. These names include Li-hsaw, Li-shaw, Lisaw, Liso, Lu-tzu, and Lissou among others, all of which appear to be different spellings or dialectical variations of the same name.

Furthermore, within the Lisu community, there is a classification system where people identify themselves using terms such as "Hei Lisu" (black Lisu), "Bai Lisu" (white Lisu) and "Hua Lisu" (flower or colourful Lisu). Presently, some Lisu people believe that this classification has been passed down over generations, considering it as a self-identificatory practice based on the distinct styles and colours of traditional costumes from different regions. However, some scholars believe that these classifications originally came from external ethnic groups referring to the Lisu people, such as Han (He 2013: 41). The earliest recorded mention of this naming convention is found in the "Barbarian Book" written by Fan Chuo during the Tang Dynasty, "… they are black and white barbarians. Men and women

dress in black hemp, their clothes trailing on the ground. To the east are the 'white barbarians,' men and women of which wear white hemp, with hemlines not exceeding the knee" (Fan 1998 [863]: volume 4). This historical record reflects indicates that divisions within the Lisu groups had already occurred. Based on different aesthetic habits and clothing styles, two branches were formed, referred to as "White Barbarians" (Bai Man) and "Black Barbarians" (Hei Man) by Han people, there are what we now know as the modern White Lisu and Black Lisu. Today's Lisu costumes have developed into a wider array of styles, making it difficult to determine affiliation based solely on clothing (see Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3).



Figure 2.1 The hat style and costume of a Hua Lisu woman from Gunagcai Township, Yongsheng County, Lijiang, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.



Figure 2.2 Costume style of a Hei Lisu woman from Songping Township, Yongsheng County, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.



Figure 2.3 Costume of Lisu Nipa from Yantou Village, Yongsheng County, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

In the recent modern era, the term “Lisu” has attracted many interpretations from diverse sources such as missionaries, scholars and outsiders. Frazer referred to them as “the people who have come down” (Fraser 1922: p. iii), indicating that they are people who migrated down from the highland areas. Other researchers have also provided accounts of the Lisu that hint at their fundamental characteristics. Morse designated the Lisu people as “loud-custom people,” trying to describe a very hospitable, articulate, and energetic people. In his opinion, they love large gatherings, and wherever Lisu people meet, their favourite thing to do is talk. Since they do not have newspapers, radio, television, and other means of communication common to more developed societies, conversation is their way of delivering news and entertainment. Their conversations are tinged with gossip, and the people with the most creative minds are probably the most popular at any social gathering. As a story travels from ear to ear and from campfire to campfire, it is often embellished and amplified until the original story may be almost unrecognizable (Morse 1974:52).

However, these external descriptions are inevitably subject to the perspectives of the observer. Steven Feld introducing the animated personalities of the Kaluli people, New Guinea, quips that such societies have acquired a dual personality in the literature: "In one type the people are portrayed as rough, pragmatic, rational, pushy, overbearing, intense, and calculating. These are the books written by white Australian and British men and male American WASPs. In the other kind of ethnography Papua New Guineans are portrayed as sentimental, warm, bubbly, engaging, hospitable, emotional, and sensitive. These are the books written by women and Jewish men" (2012: 250). This is also the case for the Lisu people, whose image varies under the pen of different writers across different periods. In some of the earliest records, Fan Chuo of the Tang Dynasty described the Lisu people as "the races of Black Barbarians and White Barbarians" in the fourth volume of his *Barbarian Book* (*Man shu*) (Fan 1998 [863]: volume 4). This image of them persisted until the Qing Dynasty, where, as recorded in the Qing-era *Dayao County Annals* (*Dayao xianzhi*) (Liu and Li 1845), the Lisu people were described as "wild and fierce."

Such a deeply entrenched characterization, I believe, cannot be separated from records of the Lisu people's rebellions against Han rule. The *Yunnan General Chronicles* (*Yunnan tongzhi*) documented the details of rebellions in the twelfth year of the Qianlong Emperor's reign [1747] and the seventh year of the Jiaqing Emperor's reign [1802], as well as Heng Zhibang, who was considered a folk hero by the Lisu people but depicted as a rebel.

In fact, most of these depictions are primarily Han-centric, taking Han culture as the highest standard, and judging other ethnic groups against it, hence viewing them as barbarians. External images of the Lisu people began to become more nuanced with the studies and travelogues of 19th and 20th-century anthropologists, missionaries, and journalists. Early explorers and geographers used terms such as "fine race," "superior people," and "fair complexioned" to describe them (Zack 2018: 14). Some scholars discovered that the Lisu people were egalitarians (Durrenberger and Tannenbaum 1992: 75).

Moreover, even the same writer's depiction could change with their explorations. For instance, during Prince Henri d'Orleans' journey through the Nu River region, he initially found the Lisu people intimidating, even deliberately avoiding Lisu villages in his travel plans. However, upon encountering a Lisu guide who led him into a village, he discovered the villagers were not only hospitable, offering fine food and wine, but also celebrated their arrival with song and dance. This experience began to shift his depiction of the Lisu to a more

friendly and welcoming one. Later on, following a disagreement with some Lisu hunters on the road, he once again portrayed the Lisu as fierce.

The varying descriptions of the Lisu people, especially their transition from an initial state of hostility towards warmth and friendliness when introduced by someone familiar, can be tied to their long history of living under the torment of war and oppressive regimes. They seem possess a strong sense of self-defence and pursuit of freedom, embodying a spirit of "preferring death to lack of freedom." Consequently, in the literature of the Qing Dynasty and the 20th century, the Lisu people were often characterized as a "brave, warlike, and unconquerable race" (Tao 2012: 268).

As we entered the 21st century, Chinese scholars have begun to rethink the past field reports, which frequently contained terms such as "backward," "primitive," and "coarse." This shift coincides with the observation made by individuals like Helen Rees, who note that various media—from film and television to print, as well as related studies, have a propensity to promote a vibrant and colourful image of ethnic minorities. A phrase often used to describe the cultural identity of these national minorities is "*nengge shanwu*," literally "can sing and are good at dancing". Southwestern minorities, in particular, are frequently depicted as "happy, smiling natives" (Rees 2000: 25).

Throughout history, outsiders have given the Lisu people different meanings. In fact, when I asked the Lisu people themselves about their interpretation of this terms, most did not have a clear explanation. They would simply have said, "We have been called Lisu for generations, and I am not sure what 'Lisu' mean in our language. I've never really thought about it. What does 'Han' mean for the Han ethnicity?" (Li Xueli, personal conversation, Lari Village, 27 March 2021). Their counter-question took me stumped momentarily and replied, "Hmm... to be honest, I am not sure about it neither." We both burst out laughing. Although there is not much explanation for their ethnic name, the Lisu people have many stories to tell about their names.

2.1.2 Naming Conventions Among the Lisu

The Lisu people who reside in the Upper Lancang and Jinsha river basins practice an animistic religion that has not been heavily influenced by dominant cultures such as Han or foreign Christianity. Nowadays, they still worship more than a dozen totem spirits based on

their ancestral culture. Zack observed that among the Lisu people who live in this area, totems are named after animals such as bees, fish, bears, tigers, monkeys, sheep, birds, rats, and snakes (2017:25). In fact, during my visits, I discovered that in addition to animal totems, there are also plant and crop totems. Each clan has a totem, and its surname is also related to the totem. For instance, there are clans with plant totems such as the purple pomelo and wood clans, and those with crop totems such as the buckwheat, grain, and hemp clans, as well as those with animal totems such as the bee, fish, and tiger clans. These totems originated from the hunting and gathering lifestyle of the earlier period and became a bond that unites the clans. There are some myths about the origin of surnames among the Lisu people. In *Exploring the Names and Naming Practices of the Lisu People,* Mu recorded the stories of the origins of surnames such as Yu (鱼 fish) and Mu (木 wood), and also conducted a statistical analysis of 18 early Lisu surnames (1995: 99-101).

Some scholars believe that with the passage of time, some Lisu surnames and totems have separated, and many Lisu clans have adopted Han surnames (Wu and Zhu, 2016). However, upon closer observation, it can be seen that most Lisu people simply changed the surnames of their totems from Lisu language to Mandarin; some of these are very easy to recognize, such as Hu (虎 tiger), Feng (蜂 bee), Xiong (熊 bear), and Gu (谷 grain), none of which is common as a Han surname. But the explanation for others remains obscure or disputed: Li (李) and He (和), for example, are also common in Han surnames. He Wenqing and Li Guiming explained these surnames as follows:

> Our 'Li' and 'He' are totally different from your Han surnames. Our 'Li' actually means chestnut or plum, and 'He' actually means rice plants (禾). But some people say it is the surname fire clans. This is a very large clan, but there is no Chinese character for fire (火) as a surname now. 'He (和)' and 'Huo (火)' have similar pronunciations in Mandarin, so it is also possible that it is the surname of fire clan. Our surnames and first names are usually taken temporarily when we register for a household or apply for a resident ID card. Many Lisu names cannot be replaced by suitable Chinese characters, so we have to find ones with similar meaning or pronunciation. (He Wenqin and Li Guiming, personal conversation, 21 November 2020 and 6 April 2021)

Therefore, the surnames of Lisu people are generally determined by their ancestors' tribe, which is a consistent explanation. However, when it comes to naming customs and practices, there are varying opinions. Lisu people have a tradition of giving Lisu names twice, once at birth and again when they get married. Both Tao Yunkui and Zhang Zhengdong have noted this in their research (see further Tao 2012:251-252, and Fraser 1922:62). In addition, in my

research on Lisu traditional wedding music culture, I observed a ritual of taking a new name during the wedding ceremony. There are principles and stories governing how to choose the marriage name, and how this name of newlywed couple can have influence the names of the couple's children in turn. It is said that the child's name must include certain syllables from the parents' marriage name to reflect the continuity and inheritance of the family (see further in the "Welcoming the Bride" section of Chapter 5).

In modern China, Lisu people, especially those who still live in the mountains, have multiple names. Their family may call them one name, while people in the village may call them another, and their official Chinese name on their ID may be completely different. Without fully understanding the different scopes and rules of Lisu names, I encountered some teasing and awkward situations during my daily life in Lisu villages. In the daily life of a Lisu family, family members rarely address each other by their given names, but rather by their birth order which identifies the individual's place within their family and community. One embarrassing incident that happened to me while living among the Lisu people occurred due to this system of addressing each other. Since I started living with Li Guiming and his mother, Li Sizhi, we had been spending time together every day. There is a man and a woman who often came to visit grandma (Li Sizhi), and she introduced them to me saying, "they are your big brother (大哥) and big sister (大姐), who live on the road above us." This is a common way of introducing family members in the Lisu, where family titles are used instead of names. Ever since then, I assumed that they were a married couple, and big brother was the husband of big sister. A few days later, Grandma took me to big sister's house for dinner, and on the wall, there was a family portrait. However, the man in the photo did not look like the man who had been introduced as big brother. I did not think too much about it at the time: perhaps the photo was taken many years ago and big sister had remarried since then (see Figure 2.4).



Figure 2.4 Li Sizhi (centre of the back row) along with some of her family members, 2009. Courtesy of Li Sizhi.

Only over two weeks later I realized that the complicated back story of relationships I had concocted in my head was all just a misunderstanding. Big brother brought along a lady I'd never seen before, while big sister showed up with the sheep-herding man in family photo. So, I asked Li Guiming in a whisper what I had been dying to know, "Did big sister and her husband remarry after getting divorced?" To which he replied, "Nah, they never split. It was actually our fourth sister who got divorced." Turns out, I had completely misunderstood the situation, and everyone got a good chuckle out of it. They explained to me that both big brother and sister were offspring of Li Sizhi. In the southwest region, lots of ethnic groups use birth rank names to call their kids, but the Lisu people take it up a notch by giving separate rankings to boys and girls. That means big brother and big sister were respectively the first-born male and female children of Li Sizhi.

In fact, the Lisu people's naming conventions based on birth rank names has been a topic of few discussions and study. Mu's research has shed light on the unique Lisu practice of assigning different rank names to male and female children, with the eldest male being referred to as "Ah pu" and the eldest female as "Ah na". Interestingly, this naming convention not only applies to siblings but also extends to cousins within the same generation (Mu 1995: 105). But he probably did not expect that one day, when the Lisu people introduce their children in Mandarin, they would still use the Lisu naming convention. However, since Mandarin does not have equivalent terms, they use "Big Brother" or "Big Sister," as already discussed (see figure 2.5).

Birth Order	Male	Female
First	Al Pu	Al Na
Second	Ar Del	Al Ngi
Third	Ar Ki	Al Qu
Fourth	Al Ci	Al Duaj
Fifth	Ar Cei	Al Kut
Sixth	Ar Yo	Al Chi
Seventh	Al Git	Ar Gel
Eighth	Al Qi	Ar Xai

Figure 2.5 Table of Lisu naming conventions based on birth rank names.

In addition, they use familial terms to address people who are not actually family members as a way to show respect, closeness, and a sense of community. As a temporary long-term resident in this community, I found that people who are older than me call me "granddaughter," while those who are of uncle or aunt generation call me "niece" or "girl." Children who are younger than me call me "older sister" or "aunt." There didn't seem to be a specific way for peers to address each other, sometimes they just use "you," "hey," or "eh" to call me. However, they often used a new name they gave me, "Liu Keai" (刘可爱, literally lovable Liu or Cutey Liu) which sounds more friendly and endearing than my given name. From these naming practices, it can be seen that family and community are highly valued in Lisu communities. People use familial terms to establish and strengthen social connections, show respect, and affection. It is also a way to recognize that people are not isolated individuals, but rather part of a larger social network.

In researching for this thesis, I found that when Lisu people find themselves in formal or external situations, they often use their Chinese names. With respect to their preferences, I have therefore chosen to use their Chinese names in this writing. In cases where it is necessary to explain their Lisu name or family name, I will do so.

2.1.3 Origins of the Lisu People

Lisu Myths and Legends

Where do they come from, and how do they perceive their own origins? These are two questions that often came to my mind when I first entered Lisu communities in 2019. The Lisu ancestors answered my questions through many myths and legends, such as the Genesis

legend and through people's oral accounts of the origin of their clans (Lisuzu 1983, and Si 1999).

The application of myths to underscore the beginnings of ethnic groups and to chronicle cultural phenomena is a ubiquitous practice among many ethnic groups in Southwest China, particularly those that rely on oral tradition as their primary mode of cultural transmission. In this area, myths are often anonymous, lacking precise authorship and specific dates. Moreover, many concepts within them are also ambiguous, such as personal and place names. Bartholomew Abanuka explains myths are typically narrated without a clear authorial attribution, lacking in logical structure, and frequently marked by ambiguity, resulting in a susceptibility to diverse interpretations (Abanuka 1999: 2). Echoing this perspective, Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that myths are organized into underlying structural patterns, the study of which "enables us to perceive some basic logical processes which are at the root of mythical thought" (1955:440). According to this view, myths are not simply arbitrary stories, but are structured in a way that reflects fundamental aspects of human thought and culture.

When discussing the origin of the Lisu, it is impossible to overlook their Genesis legend, which holds significant cultural and historical importance for the Lisu people and has helped shape their beliefs, values, and traditions over time. This epic poem, which is traditionally sung by the Lisu's *nipa*, is called "muji luoji" or "muji miji" in the Lisu language and is passed down orally from generation to generation. "Mu" refer to the universe or sky, "luo" or "mi" refer to the earth or ground, and "li" means achievement or creation, so this epic poem can be interpreted as describing the creation of the world (Li Guiming, personal conversation, Jishuitang Village, 7 April 2021). In terms of content, the poem basically can be divided into two parts. The first part tells the story of the origin and development of the world and the Lisu people. The second part deals with issues that emerged during the Lisu's development, including their faith, labour, and daily life. This section touches on topics such as religion, divination, art, farming, medicine, morality, and war.

The earliest written record and study on the origin of the Lisu people is provided by the British authors Archibald Rose and J. Coggin Brown, who wrote an article called "Lisu (yawjin) Tribes of the Burma-China Frontier." This work was published in the *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* and includes a section specifically dedicated to the "Legend of the Origin of the Lisu Race", which gives an overview of its content (1910: 252-253). More recently, Xu Lin published a fuller translation (into Chinese) of the legend as found in Bijiang

County,[7] two extracts from which run as follows. The first recounts "the Flood" and the second is "The Splitting of the Comb":

The gourds were prepared long ago,
Only Brother Lai-sa remains,
Only Qi-sa Meimei remains.
Only one lone brother remains,
Only one lone sister remains,
They hide in the gourd for refuge,
Taking shelter in the gourd leaves.
Hardly a place to dock,
Hardly a place to drift.
Drifting for seven days and nights,
Floating for nine days and nights.
The great river's flow has dried up,
The great river's water has fallen.

To create is truly to create,
To invent is truly to invent.
What to do if the human race is destroyed?
What if labour is cut off?
For fear of the destruction of the human race,
For fear of the end of labour,
The comb must be split in two,
The bracelet must be broken in two.
Brother goes north to find people,
Sister goes south to seek companions.
Spiders are weaving the veins of the earth,
Bees are busy merging the earth's shell.
Trees act as intermediaries,

[7] This was a former administrative county that has now been abolished, and its jurisdiction has been merged into the Lushui County and Fugong County in Nujiang Prefecture, China.

Stones become rice cakes.

The human race is still not found,

Labour still has no place.

Brother and sister reunite at the centre of the earth,

Brother and sister meet at the centre of the valley.

Brother's hair is already white,

Sister's eyes are starting to wrinkle.

They take out the comb to compare,

They take out the bracelet to compare.

The two halves of the comb are aligned,

The two pieces of the bracelet are joined.

Only brother and sister can marry,

Only brother and sister can become husband and wife. (Xu 1981: 103-115, my translation)

In 1925, Wa Renbo, the 20th generation priest of the Lisu *nipa* in Weixi County, Diqing Prefecture, invented a Lisu bamboo writing system to record the "Genesis legend." This was the first time that the Lisu people had created a written system (the others were created by foreigners), and its account of the origin of the Lisu people differs somewhat from that translated by Xu. The following passage provides an illustration of its style and content:

> After the flood, there was only one man left in the world. He married a heavenly goddess, and they had six sons who were all unable to speak. One day, these six children saw a horse eating crops in the field. They were reluctant to see the crops being destroyed, so they urgently spoke to their parents in six different languages, saying "the horse the vegetables is eating!"[8] As a result, these six children gave rise to the six ethnic groups and languages of the Lisu, Han, Tibetan, Naxi, Bai, and Nu. (Mu, 1995:4)

Although no more historical records have been discovered, Mu observes that the "Genesis Legend" recognizes that the languages of the Lisu, Han, Tibetan, Naxi, Bai, and Nu are related, all belonging to the Sino-Tibetan language family. In fact, under the influence of modernization, globalization, and mainstream culture, fewer and fewer *nipas* are now able to sing the entire genesis legend, and there are not many young people who are passionate about learning it. Today, we can still hear a part of it at weddings, funerals, major festivals, and

[8] That is "the horse is eating the vegetables." There are some grammatical differences between the Lisu language and both English and Chinese. For example, in Lisu, some objects are placed before verb, whereas in English and Chinese, verbs typically come before the subject.

ceremonies, especially in Lisu villages. As it is an oral tradition, different places have different versions, and even adjacent villages may have subtle differences in the narrative content. This is also reflected in the research of many scholars, such as Zhang Zhengdong's "The Human Origin Legend of the Lisu" (Zhang: 1948), Zhu Faqing's compilation of Lisu folktales based on legends collected in Nujiang Prefecture (1985: 1-12), and the Lisu history collectively compiled by the Minority Social History Survey Group and the Institute of Ethnology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences based on their investigations of the Lisu people in Nujiang, Dehong, Chuxiong, and Lijiang (1985:5-16). Since the 20th century, although many scholars have conducted research on the origin of the Lisu people, it seems that they have mainly built upon the historical materials of their predecessors, without collection of new materials, such as Li Shuangli (2020) and Luo Xin (2017).

Although there are differences in details, these varied stories and propositions all revolve around a central narrative thread—that of the flood and the actions of a sibling pair. In fact, when we take a broader perspective, we find that the narrative of a flood and the sibling pair is a common theme in many origin myths of ethnic groups in the Southwest China region, and not solely found among the Lisu people. What's more, this theme is not exclusive to Chinese ethnic minorities; variations of it can be found in the mythologies of cultures around the world. For example, the Biblical story of Noah and the Ark is a well-known flood myth in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Similarly, the Epic of Gilgamesh, an ancient Mesopotamian poem, also tells the story of a great flood and the rebirth of mankind. In these myths, the flood often signifies a kind of divine punishment or a natural disaster that brings about the end of a previous world order. The siblings, who are typically the only survivors of this disaster, then become the progenitors of a new human generation, marking a new beginning.

Further Academic Research on the Origins of the Lisu People

As the field of social science has progressed, scholars have continued to delve deeper into the origins of the Lisu people, resulting in a variety of perspectives on the matter. Most existing research agrees on one point: the Lisu people are primarily considered to have originated from the ancient Diqiang tribes in the northern part of the Qinghai-Tibet plateau.

Support for the Qinghai-Tibet plateau theory can be found across multiple disciplines. Firstly, many scholars from history claim that the ancestors of the Lisu people originated from the ancient Diqiang tribes who live in Qinghai-Tibet plateau area in the pre-Qin period (221 to

206 BC) (Si 1999, Yang 2002). Yang and his team have provided comprehensive analysis of the Lisu's migration patterns throughout different historical periods. From the Tang dynasty (618-907) to the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), Lisu people travelled from the Qinghai-Tibet plateau area along Yalong river in Sichuan, reaching the Jinsha, Nu, and Lancang rivers of Yunnan (Lisuzu 1983). By the mid to late 19th century, some Lisu groups had crossed the Gaoligong Mountain and moved westward into Myanmar, with a few venturing as far as Laos, Thailand, and India (Hou 2010).

Secondly, another important reason that the view of Lisu origin from the QT-plateau is generally accepted by most scholars is that there is tremendous historical data highlighting the Lisu's close ties with the Yi and other groups from the Yi language family. The Yi people comprise an ethnic group that emerged from the blending of Diqiang and local indigenous tribes during their southward migration. According to several studies, the Yi share some similar cultural and societal customs with the Lisu. Examples of these shared customs include the torch festival, the knife pole festival, the new rice festival, and fire worship (Si 1999). Moreover, studies on the totem system of clans mentioned above can also help us understand the relationship among different clans and tribes in ancient times, because the clan totem is an important symbol that distinguishes clan boundaries. Many researchers found that Lisu in the Nujiang area kept a distinct clan system and totem worship until the early post-liberation period. Among these clans, several clan names and their totem worship forms are basically similar to Yi's totem system (Lisuzu 1983: 10–12).

Thirdly, genetic research has also made a contribution to identifying or verifying ancestral genealogical relationships and to estimate the ethic mixture of Lisu. In the context of prior evidence establishing the Nu people as descendants of the Diqiang tribes, a study by Chen Shangwu and his team analysed the distribution of HLA class I and class II genes in Lisu and Nu populations. Their findings clearly showed that Lisu and Nu are closely related (Chen et al. 2007). Further research supports this, highlighting many shared characteristics between the Lisu and Nu people across various aspects (He 2009).

Having considered the complexities in the history of the Lisu people, it is necessary to acknowledge that the continuous intermingling, division, and recombination over the past thousand years, coupled with the absence of written Lisu literature, makes it challenging to draw a clear conclusion about their origins. Assuming that the Lisu are indeed descendants of the ancient Diqiang tribes, originating from the northern part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau,

how did they gradually establish their current population distribution? In the next section, I will provide a brief overview of the Lisu's migrations.

2.2 Why Do the Lisu People Keep Migrating?

According to the discussion in the previous section, Chinese scholars generally believe that the Lisu people, who currently inhabit the upper reaches of the Jinsha (Yangtze), Lancang (Mekong), and Nujiang (Salween) rivers, descended from the ancient Diqiang tribes. They posit that these tribes migrated from northern part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to southwest China, gradually evolving into the Lisu people. The questions surrounding the specifics of how they migrated, how they developed into the Lisu people, and what clues can be found to their evolution have attracted the attention of many Chinese scholars. However, the historical records directly pertaining to Lisu people are relatively scarce. Therefore, scholars have relied on fragments of information about the Lisu people gleaned from non-Lisu historical sources and have make deductions based on general migration patterns in the entire southwestern region. While the discussion of migration itself is not the main focus of my research, my aim is to lay a groundwork for understanding the diversity of Lisu musical culture in my thesis.

As for the Lisu's migration history, Lisu oral culture—including its ancient songs—has given us some clues. In the article "A Brief Discussion of the Migration History of the Lisu People Based on the Lisu Epic," Lisu scholar Zhang Ziqiang summarized the five migrations of the Lisu people based on ancient songs about human population increases and migration. The first major migration occurred around the Yuan Dynasty, when groups migrated from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to the Yungui Plateau, mainly becoming distributed in the Yalong River and Jinsha River basins on the border between Sichuan and Yunnan; the second major migration occurred in the early Ming Dynasty, with families migrating from the Yalong River and Jinsha River basins to the Lancang River basin; the third occurred in the 15th century, when Lisu people migrated from the Jinsha River and Lancang River basins to the Nu River basin; the fourth occurred in the 19th century, with a large-scale migration into the Nu River basin; the fifth migration was from the Nu River basin to countries such as Myanmar and Thailand (Zhang 2016: 99-102). Scholars studying the historical geography of southwestern China have further identified significant migrations of the Lisu people through various

means, including the examination of place names, personal names, and historical events. Why do the Lisu people keep migrating?

2.2.1 Military Action, Ethnic Oppression, and Failed Uprisings

Lisu migration history has aroused the interest and research of both Han scholars and members of the Lisu community, and the prevailing view that has emerged is a theory of ethnic oppression. This theory suggests that the root cause of the Lisu people's large and dispersed distribution pattern resulting from migration was their resistance to the cruel rule of feudal authorities.

The research puts forward three sub-reasons: military action, ethnic oppression, and failed uprisings. For instance, Scott suggests that the region's abundant ethnic groups, diverse cultures, different societies, and frequent population movements are due to mountainous groups evading the rule of the lowland state, or the "state effect." In his analytical framework, the frequent migration of mountainous ethnic groups, their inefficient livelihoods, simple social structures, and lack of written language are all characteristics of the "art" of evading governance (Scott 2009).

The first such large-scale migration took place from the region of Erhai (洱海) in Sanlangzhao (三浪诏) towards the north, east, and west during the Tang Dynasty (and continued through to the late Ming Dynasty, 627-1619) (Li 2020:7). Due to the wars between the Tang Dynasty, Nanzhao, and Tubo, the Lisu ancestors who initially resided in the northern borders of Tubo found themselves forced to move towards the northwestern part of Yunnan (Zhang 2007: 117-118). This change in habitation was significant, but it enabled the Lisu to enjoy a relatively independent state of development outside the effective governance of the Tang Dynasty, the Tubo, and Nanzhao (Li 2020: 34-35).

As we move into the era of the Ming Dynasty, governmental centralization was at its peak, and control over southwestern minority regions deepened. *Yi Zu Jian Shi* (Yizu 2009) combined historical records and oral history to clearly document a major migration of the Lisu people from the Jinsha River to the Lancang River and Nu River in the west. The direct cause was wars between the Lijiang local government led by the Mu Family and the Tibetan feudal ruling group, which occurred during the Jiaqing to Wanli years (1522-1620 AD) of the Ming Dynasty (Lisuzu 1983:17-20).

Transitioning into the 17th to 19th century, the Lisu people faced even greater oppression under the rule of Qing Dynasty nationalism. Dissatisfaction and resentment grew amongst the Lisu due to this exploitative rule, ultimately sparking uprisings. These failed uprisings led to three separate Lisu migrations, all of which were conducted from east to west, adhering to the Lisu statement of "moving in the direction of the setting sun." The uprisings that sparked these migrations were notably the Heng Zhabeng Uprising in the eighth year of the Jiaqing reign (1803). In honour of this event, a monument was erected by the county government in Heng Zhabeng's birthplace in 2017 (see Figure 2.6). The further uprisings included the Lisu Tanggui Uprising in Yongbei (now Yongsheng county, Lijiang) in the first year of the Daoguang reign (1821) and the Lisu Ding Honggui and Gu Laosi Uprising in Yongbei in the 20th year of the Guangxu reign (1894) (Li 2020: 27-54).



Figure 2.6 Heng Zhabeng Memorial Monument in Wexi County, Deqen Prefecture, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

2.2.2 Other Reasons

The reasons behind the migration history of the Lisu people are diverse, including large-scale long-distance migrations that occur suddenly within a short period of time, as well as small-scale local migrations that occur over a long period of time. These reasons include not only migrations caused by the failure of uprisings, but also other factors. For instance, in the 1820s, after the Qing Dynasty implemented the "Land Reform and Return" policy, the local economy transitioned from a feudal lord system to a landlord system. A substantial influx of Han Chinese migrated to the minority regions of Yunnan. These settlers began farming in the fields and forests inhabited by the Lisu people, causing severe environmental damage,

including soil erosion. This degradation posed significant ecological pressure on the Lisu people's daily life, as they still relied heavily on nature for their primary production and way of living at the time (Li 2020: 78).

Furthermore, starting from the mid-19th century, the Lisu people embarked on large-scale migrations to the Kachin and Shan States in Myanmar, as well as to the northern regions of Thailand. This has resulted in their widespread presence across the northern mainland of Southeast Asia today. Apart from escaping conflict, there were two other significant reasons prompting these migrations. Firstly, the British-led colonization of Southeast Asia accelerated the mass cultivation of opium. This sparked the opium trade among the minority ethnic groups in southwestern China, which has served as one of the primary livelihoods for the Lisu people for over a century. A key motivator for their migration was the opportunity to engage in poppy cultivation and the opium trade (Zack 2017: 36). Secondly, the rising jade market in Myanmar, particularly noticeable in recent decades due to increasing global demand, has drawn many workers from various ethnic groups in southwest China, including the Lisu people. They have migrated to Myanmar to work in the jade mines or to participate in various other roles in the jade trade.

Collectively, migration was not solely the result of external objective factors; it was also influenced by internal subjective forces, with migration being an outcome of the continual interaction between these two aspects. Following their long history of migration, the Lisu people have formed a population distribution characterized by broad dispersion and small-scale settlement. Their migration pattern, marked by extensive routes, long duration, and a wide area, raises intriguing questions. How has this migration pattern influenced their musical expressions in their current environments? What characteristics of change and diversity will their music exhibit? After cohabiting and blending cultures with other minority groups, how will the Lisu people identify themselves? These are some of the critical questions that this thesis intends to discuss and explore.

2.3 Lisu in Contemporary China

In the early 20th century, China experienced a shift in its identity conception, transitioning from an empire to a nation-state. Intellectuals like Liang Qichao started using the term

“minzu” (民族, borrowed from Japanese) to describe China as a nation defined by common characteristics like descent, territory, and culture (Peng 1985:9). However, this new national identity primarily revolved around the Han ethnicity, excluding others like the Manchus. Sun Yat-sen’s idea of a “Republic of Five Nationalities” represented a more inclusive approach, acknowledging the diverse ethnic groups within China (Sun 1928:12). Yet, the peoples of Southwest China were still marginalized, lacking historical state sovereignty and full integration into this national framework.

After 1949, the Chinese Communist Party inherited both the cultural nationalism of the Republic era and Marxist-Leninist views on ethnicity. Their official policy emphasized equality among all ethnic groups, resisting both the imperial model of legal inequality and the nation-state model of erasing ethnic differences. The Party aimed to establish a “unified multi-national state,” granting equal status to all ethnic groups in China, including smaller, less politically organized groups. For example, the central Communist government in Beijing, three thousand kilometres away from Lisu areas, launched a series of ongoing projects to bring Yunnan’s indigenous people and ethnic groups into state control for the sake of unity in the Chinese nation-state. Meanwhile, as the Chinese Communist Party pursued economic and political development, it implemented a developmental policy urging “brother nationalities” (兄弟民族, xiongdi minzu) to follow the advanced Han’ example. Although this approach differed theoretically from imperial era policies, it was evident that various ethnic groups were classified based on their developmental stages, with the Han continuing as a model for others to emulate.

The Chinese Communist Party has consistently confronted the challenge of balancing ethnic diversity within the framework of a unified nation-state. This task is inherently complex, as the drive for a unified national identity often contradicts the reality of China's multiple ethnic identities. In transforming into a modern state, China blurred traditional ethnic boundaries, advocating for centralized governance alongside regional autonomy. Culturally, numerous projects were initiated to elevate non-Han ethnic groups to higher levels of civilization, a process termed by Stevan Harrell as the “literizing project” (Harrell 2001: 27). These cultural transformation, alongside political shifts, profoundly impacted both the culture and society of the Lisu people, and in the following discussion, I will explore the specific effects of these nationwide developments in turn.

2.3.1 The State of Lisu Culture in China Since 1949

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Lisu ethnic region came under the jurisdiction of the Chinese Communist Party. Two significant projects were introduced to integrate the "minority nationality" peoples into national subjects within socialist China: the "ethnic identification" (民族识别, *minzu shibie*) project and a wave of ethnological research that began in the 1980s after the end of the Cultural Revolution (Mueggler 2002: 7).

The first project sought to create a "fraternal cooperative family" composed of culturally distinct but formally equal peoples. Each ethnic group was officially represented in the People's Congress, and objective criteria were employed to assign each citizen an official ethnic group (Fei, 1980). In the undertaking the project, hundreds of researchers were trained in linguistic and ethnological methodologies and dispatched to rural areas to examine various independent groups seeking official ethnic status. From the summer of 1956 to the winter of 1960, a social-historical investigation of the Lisu society was conducted in more than thirty counties spanning the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, the Lijiang region, and the Xichang region in Sichuan Province (Lisuzu 1983: 137). During this period, the Communist government acknowledged the cultural diversity of ethnic minorities and emphasized the importance of preserving their music and dance traditions. As part of these preservation efforts, state-sponsored song and dance troupes were created. For instance, in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, the Fugong Culture and Art Propaganda Team was formed in 1961. Just two years later, in 1963, it underwent reorganization and was subsequently renamed the Nujiang Prefecture Culture and Art Troupe. Following this change, five more county-level culture and art troupes were established from 1963 onward (Diao 2016: 92).

Afterwards, the study of Lisu culture virtually came to a halt, only picking up again after the end of the Cultural Revolution ended. During this time, signs of local difference were condemned as remnants of backward societal stages, and Lisu culture was criticized as feudal and superstitious. Local elders informed me that although many Lisu lived in relatively remote areas and were spared the worst of these attacks due to their primarily oral culture, the prohibition did hinder the transmission and inheritance of Lisu cultural practices. According to Yang Yuanji, the head of the prefecture's song and dance troupe, the main task of the troupe during the Cultural Revolution was to spread propaganda for government policies in

mountainous and rural areas through performance. In some instances, this involved rewriting the texts of collected folk songs to suit their purposes, a practice referred to as "putting new wine in old bottles" (Diao 2016: 92). Others translated Chinese lyrics of red songs to Lisu language, such as "Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China" (Li Zhenkun, personal interview, Liming Township, 8 January 2021).

It was not until the 1980s, following the end of the Cultural Revolution, that the Lisu people were allowed to recover and self-develop their traditional culture. This renaissance was guaranteed by consecutive constitutional provisions. For instance, the 1982 Constitution of the People's Republic of China states in Article 119 that "Autonomous organs of ethnic autonomous areas shall autonomously manage the educational, scientific, cultural, health and sports undertakings of their areas, protect and restore the cultural heritage of their ethnic groups, and promote the development and a thriving of ethnic cultures." Moreover, Article 122 provides that "The state shall provide financial, material and technical assistance to ethnic minorities to accelerate their economic and cultural development."[9]

In tandem with these developments, as mentioned earlier, a wave of ethnological knowledge production was initiated. This resurgence was spearheaded by minority intellectuals who had received education in the 1950s and were now renewing their interest in ethnology. The movement led to the establishment of new ethnological research institutes and the appearance of numerous ethnic studies journals. Moreover, ethnological materials drafted in the 1950s were republished or published for the first time. Widely cited works such as *An Investigation of the Social History of the Lisu* (傈僳族社会历史调查) (Yunnan 1981) and *A Brief History of the Lisu* (傈僳族简史) (Lisuzu 1983) were among these publications. From this period onwards, Lisu culture began to draw the attention of scholars across various disciplines. Concurrently, the introduction of new research methodologies from the West marked a departure from the functionalist methods that dominated the 1950s. This change led to a significant expansion in the scope of valid investigations providing new perspectives and opportunities for scholarly exploration.

These projects have elevated the music and dance of non-Han ethnic groups like the Lisu to greater global prominence. However, depictions of these performing arts are often defined

[9] Constitution of the People's Republic of China, http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/constitution2019/201911/1f65146fb6104dd3a2793875d19b5b29.shtml, accessed 7 November 2021.

from other's perspective, like early literature on the Lisu where music, dance, and instruments were frequently described using Han concepts or in terms understandable to the Han audience. Each ethnicity's "representative" and "authoritative" music and dance have become stereotypical identifiers, a phenomenon Wong Chuen-fung sees as providing a ready, even shorthand way to assert a Chinese version of modern culture. He notes that the musical otherness in performing arts is often utilized for pragmatic purposes beyond representational needs (Wong 2023: 453). These "labels" for minority music and dance often lack contextual substance, thus overlooking the diversity and complexity within each ethnic group's culture.

These scholarly developments unfolded in parallel with complex shifts in the lived experiences of the Lisu people themselves. Contemporary Lisu people are facing paradoxical expectations of being a "perfect" minority ethnic group who are successfully living in two worlds, that of the indigenous world and that of modern China society. On one hand, the Lisu people are expected to acquire the same knowledge and skills as their counterparts from other ethnic groups, particularly the Han Chinese. This includes pursuing quality education and achieving professional success in a wide variety of fields, reflecting the broader societal expectations of modern China. On the other hand, despite their engagement with modernity and interactions with other cultures, the Lisu people are also expected to preserve their indigenous culture in its original form. This expectation is not merely imposed by outsiders; it arises within the Lisu community as well. The Lisu people understand the importance of maintaining their traditional knowledge and skills, not just for cultural preservation, but also for practical reasons related to their life in the mountains. This preservation also aids in upholding their distinct beliefs and reinforcing their sense of identity.

2.3.2 Society

The Lisu have been impacted by many of the social, political, and economic changes that have reshaped China since 1949. Most recently, the "Poverty Alleviation Campaign" was initiated by the Chinese government in 2015 with the aim of ensuring that impoverished populations in rural areas achieve poverty alleviation by 2020. The strategy particularly sought to address the issues of absolute poverty and regional poverty prevalent among ethnic minorities and in ethnic regions. This strategy brought about improvements and opportunities for many Lisu in various aspects such as living conditions, transportation, education, and lifestyle.

Lisu people traditionally lived in dwellings that they shared with their livestock: humans occupied the upper part, while pigs were kept below. This not only caused unhygienic conditions but also posed numerous safety and health hazards. Some villages were precariously located on steep cliff slopes by the river, posing risks of mudslide disasters. To improve the living conditions of the Lisu people, the government undertook a grading system for their houses. The evaluation was based on the conditions of the foundation, superstructure, and roof of the houses. Measures were implemented to reinforce, remodel, replace, or repair parts of houses that were at risk but did not require total demolition, aiming to ensure the safety of the primary components and structure of rural houses, meeting basic quality requirements and local earthquake resistance standards. For households living in critically damaged buildings that couldn't be repaired, a "relocation" strategy to new "immigrant villages" was adopted. The government-built apartment complexes in townships or suburbs provided relocated residents with free essential household items including colour TVs, refrigerators, bowls, chopsticks, etc. Immigrants simply needed to bring their personal belongings and move in (see Figure 2.7).



Figure 2.7 "Happy Homeland" Poverty Alleviation Resettlement Town in Kangpu County, Kangpu Township, Weixi County, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

However, according to feedback from village officials, despite the new accommodation provided by the government, some villagers still secretly returned to live in their hazardous houses in the mountains. For those villagers' safety, the officials resorted to patient education or even cutting off power and water supplies to their unsafe homes, aiming to encourage

villagers to leave their previous dwellings. Yet, many villagers chose to endure lighting candles for illumination and fetching water rather than return to the resettlement town.

In fact, the villagers in question noted their own difficulties: “What will I eat and drink living there?” “What will I rely on for a living here?” “My flock of sheep is still on the mountain,” “My fields are still growing corn and medicinal herbs,” “I can’t live without the hearth,” “It’s ten miles to the Resettlement Town, it’s impossible to commute every day,” “The living space at home is too small,” “My house has been assigned on the fifth floor, I have never lived in such a building before: I feel dizzy every day without my feet on the ground” (Kangpu Village’s villagers, group conversation, 25 March 2021). It is evident that what everyone cares about most are basic needs and livelihoods. As of 2020, aside from these few buildings, the infrastructure in the rather remote resettlement area was still not fully developed. Therefore, it seems that establishing a poverty alleviation resettlement site is just the first step. Making life convenient for residents and providing employment opportunities locally will be the true starting points for ensuring their retention and safety.

Transportation is indeed another vital aspect of the assistance provided. For example, the maintenance of secondary highways, specifically National Highway 215, was the most significant public welfare transportation project in this region during the “13th Five-Year Plan” period (2016-2020). Its route starts from Weixi County and ends at Tongdian Town in Lanping County, with a length of 87.31 kilometres, of which the Weixi section is 37.3 kilometres long. There are 106 bridges along the entire route, 72 of them located in the Weixi section, and six tunnels, five of which are in the Weixi section. The project had a duration of three years, from 2018 to 2020, and officially began trial operation on the night of November 26, 2020.[10] The highway allowed Lisu people residing in Nujiang, Lijiang, and Weixi to travel across the region in a much shorter time, as well as reach the high-speed train stations and airports in Lijiang and Dali. This stimulated the adjustment of the agricultural and rural industrial structure and encouraged the significant development of passenger and cargo transportation. It not only facilitated the lives of the Lisu people and increased their income opportunities but also strengthened cultural exchanges.

In addition to increasing the proportion of secondary and higher-grade highways to impoverished county towns, efforts have been made to promote the hardening of roads within

[10] See further in Diqing Perfect news report on support for highway construction in Weixi County, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ftEsWT7iyqlx8sNWdPqp-Q, accessed 4 December 2022.

villages.[11] The villages inhabited by the Lisu are largely located in hilly regions and deep mountain valleys. Weak transportation infrastructure has always been one of the primary factors in the relative isolation of Lisu life. According to most local villages of Weixi County, prior to the implementation of the poverty alleviation campaign, the road infrastructure was mostly limited to secondary roads within the county town. The roads from the villages to the county town or other villages were either foot-worn trails or dirt roads dug out collectively by the villagers themselves.

By 2020, in the dozens of villages I visited, concrete roads have been essentially established leading to each village, running through the entirety of the village, and only the most remote households now lack access to cement roads. This has undoubtedly elicited praise from countless villagers as improved road networks significantly boosted local economy, healthcare, and overall quality of life by facilitating easier and safer transportation, especially for households with cars or motorcycles. Villagers without personal transport are anticipating more comprehensive public transportation facilities, but in places like Weixi county, as of 2020, there were still no public buses or taxis operating, not to mention inter-village transportation. These villagers mainly relied on walking for commuting or hitching a ride in a private rural passenger vehicle that comes irregularly.

Education was also a critical focus of the poverty alleviation efforts. By 2020, the government aimed to universally implement preschool education, further enhance the quality of nine-year compulsory education in primary and secondary schools, popularize high school education, and accelerate the development of remote continuing education and community education. Historically, even prior to 1949, Chinese governments utilized education as a means to integrate or acculturate people living in the country's geographical margins, such as the spread of Confucian education during the Qing Dynasty (Elman 1994: 111-149) and the establishment of frontier education bureaus in Yunnan (Liu 1993: 68). The government-controlled educational system has long been viewed as a tool for promoting national commitment, devotion to the ruling Chinese Communist Party, and cultural homogeneity. In this context, patriotic education (爱国教育 aiguo jiaoyu), becomes particularly significant in the state's agenda, especially for non-Han communities in border regions. As Mette Halskov Hansen notes, the Chinese educational system aims to achieve a high degree of cultural and

[11] For more details, please refer to Document No. 35 issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council in 2011, titled "Outline of China's Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development (2011-2020)", https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2011/content_2020905.htm, accessed 4 December 2022.

political uniformity, enabling communication across diverse regions, integrating peripheral areas into the national framework, fostering patriotism and allegiance to the Communist Party, and broadly striving to “improve the quality” and “civilize” parts of the population considered “backward” (Hansen 1999: xii)

Nevertheless, since the launch of these strategies in 2011, the Lisu ethnic group have faced challenges in achieving these educational standards. They grapple with challenges such as living in high-altitude areas, persistent household poverty, distinct cultural norms, a lack of awareness about the value of formal education, and limited educational resources. Additionally, the geographical remoteness of Lisu communities, with some schools being as far as 110 kilometres apart, and insufficient public transportation options, contribute to the relatively low enrolment rates among Lisu children. In response to these challenges, the government undertook several measures. These include increased financial subsidies for students, funding for the construction and improvement of primary and secondary schools, and the creation of new boarding schools to accommodate students from remote areas. According to the village officials of Lari Village, Weixi, their regular duties also included household visits to promote the importance of modern education, aiming to change the villagers’ perceptions. The fact that children were largely absent from the village from Monday to Friday during my half-year observation period suggested these efforts are starting to yield positive outcomes.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has introduced policies to enhance ethnic minority students’ access to higher education, including awarding additional points in the Gaokao, China’s national university entrance exam. This initiative aims to address social disparities and increase opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged groups. However, substantial gaps still exist in the educational attainment and subsequent job prospects between ethnic minorities, particularly those in remote areas, and their Han counterparts. Therefore, ethnic minority children, including those from the Lisu community, feel a growing pressure to intensify their efforts in acquiring Mandarin proficiency. This pursuit of broader social participation and improved job prospects often necessitates a deeper engagement with Mandarin education, even if it potentially risks overshadowing their ethnic languages and cultural traditions. This presents a complex scenario where the Lisu, among other ethnic minorities, navigate the balance between preserving their cultural heritage and integrating into broader Chinese society for enhanced opportunities.

2.4 Lisu Music Literature

2.4.1 Early Sources

The extant literature and archival resources related to music and dance of Lisu people from southwestern China, are notably scarce before the 20th century. Since the did not possess a writing system until 1914, there are no surviving documents or written artifacts originating from the Lisu people themselves prior to that date. The understanding of Lisu musical and dance practices from that era relies on incidental records found in the accounts authored by other ethnic groups neighbouring the Lisu, Western colonial authorities, explorers, and missionaries. The form these accounts take varies widely, encompassing official documents, travelogues, diaries, and books. One such example of a valuable primary source is the account provided by Prince Henri d'Orléans. Journeying through the Lameti valley in August 1895, he chronicled the dance forms and musical instruments found in what is presently recognized as Weixi County.

The first substantial survey and record of Lisu music and dance in southwestern of China was carried out during the 1950s "ethnic identification" project previously mentioned. The results of this survey were published in *A Brief History of the Lisu* (Lisuzu 1983). Alongside other information, this publication introduces the basic characteristics of Lisu folk songs, dances, and musical instruments. It's important to note that during this stage, the accounts were written from the perspective of the Han ethnicity. For example, when researchers introduced three categories of Lisu musical instruments, they used Chinese language translations such as the instrument names "*pipa*," "*erhu*," "*kouxian*", and "*dizi*" (Lisuzu 1983: 128-131). In reality, the Lisu instruments differ somewhat in design and practice from their Han counterparts and have their own unique names. Despite these differences, this early material continues to serve as an essential reference for scholars today.

Around the same time, numerous scholars began to document and study Lisu music in various regions, including northern Thailand, northern India, and northern Myanmar. For instance, Paul Durrenberger, an anthropologist specializing in Lisu religion, provides descriptions of the music used in Lisu soul-calling ceremonies (Durrenberger 1971, Durrenberger 1975). Hans Larsen, in his work, examines the general features of Lisu vocal and instrumental music in the various social contexts where it is performed (Larsen 1984).

Furthermore, Asim Maitra embarked on an extensive investigation into the Lisu community in Arunachal Pradesh, India. In the second chapter of his book, Maitra briefly introduces the musical culture of the Lisu (Maitra 1993). The collective findings from these research endeavours illustrate a research perspective that is more comprehensive and closely aligned with the viewpoint of the Lisu people.

Later, more and more scholar and musicians began to penetrate the Lisu people's lands to discover and record their music, dance, customs, and culture using the research methods of musicology and ethnomusicology with precision to more specific geographical regions. For example, Yang Minkang introduced the songs and dances of Lisu living in Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture and the lower reaches of the Nu River. He examines the relationship between Lisu music and dance and the natural calendar. His investigation suggests a possible integration of Han culture within Lisu music, as the calendar used by the Lisu people bears associations with the Five Elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), a fundamental concept in traditional Chinese philosophy (Yang 1987).

Later, in 1994, the publication *Lisu Folk Customs* (傈僳风俗志) offered a more comprehensive exploration of Lisu music and culture (Si and Li 1994). The publication depicted real-life events and music scenes, provided detailed introductions to songs, instruments, and dance forms, and featured excerpts and analyses of lyrics from a selection of Lisu songs. This work demonstrated the Lisu people's adeptness at adapting music to a variety of situations and indicated a significant potential for improvisatory recreation in Lisu music, illustrating the value that Lisu people place on music, dance, and poetry as integral components of their lives. This work also emphasized that Lisu music does not exist in a vacuum but is a living, vibrant part of their culture. Significantly, when introducing Lisu songs and instruments, the authors consciously maintain their Lisu names, which they transliterate using Chinese pinyin. This marks an important step towards acknowledging and preserving the cultural specificity of Lisu musical traditions.

The publication "Chapter 30: Lisu Music History" (傈僳族音乐史) in *Chinese Ethnic Music History Volume II* (中国少数民族音乐史), released in January 1998, delves deeper into the origins and history of Lisu music (Yuan 1998). In addition to summarizing the historical evolution of Lisu music, Yuan also recorded, transcribed, and analysed the internal structure and logic of the music, such as rhythm, interval relations, and pattern descriptions, using

methodologies from comparative musicology. Moreover, instead of using “Lisu people” or anonymous as before, this book introduces individual Lisu musicians, such as Yang Yuanji, Yang Chunmao, and Li Wenhua.

The release of *Chinese Ethnic Music History Volume* marked a new era of academic interest in Lisu music, with scholars expanding their explorations in this field. According to the Chinese academic database CNKI, between 1998 and May 20, 2006, the date when Lisu music and dance were recognized as national intangible cultural heritage, 17 related studies were published. These studies took on a diverse range of content. For example, some scholars explored Lisu multipart folk songs and ritual music (Fan 1986, Du 1993). There are also some introductory articles on Lisu instruments (Wu 1983, Liu 1989, Chen 1996)l.

This increased academic activity signalled a shift towards the recognition of the rich musical traditions of the Lisu people and the contributions of individual minority musicians. Such acknowledgment served dual purposes: it provided a means of safeguarding cultural heritage and facilitated communication and understanding across the diverse ethnic groups that constitute China. However, alongside this increased recognition and preservation of Lisu music, there was a parallel process that carried implications of cultural control. Observations of Lisu music in later years showed how what was once a wide range of unrestricted minority expressions began to transition into manipulated and adapted art forms. Lisu music began to be distilled and transformed into polished stage performances.

2.4.2 Intangible Cultural Heritage Era 2006 and Onward

Following the designation of the traditional music and dance genre known as *achi mugua* as a national Intangible Cultural Heritage on 20 May 2006, a surge of academic interest has been directed towards Lisu music and dance. To date, over 200 scholarly papers and books have been published on this subject, with more than 30 directly focusing on *achi mugua*.

Achi Mugua

Upon reviewing these works, a prominent trend emerges—researchers have primarily addressed the issue of heritage preservation and inheritance. For example, Wang Yifan

delved into the history of *achi mugua*, tracing its roots back to Tongle Village, Weixi County, Diqing Prefecture, Yunnan Province (Wang 2020). He elucidated the formation of the syllabary employed in its lyrics and outlined variations in sacrificial songs across different villages. Central to Wang's research was the comparison of inheritors of two different generations, Xiong Ziyi and Li Biqing. The older generation, represented by Xiong Ziyi, holds a traditional view on inheritance, shaped by oral and experiential learning, which upholds strict adherence to established norms. On the other hand, representatives of the younger generation, like Li Biqing, argue for a more adaptive approach that aligns with modern trends and methods of musical inheritance. This viewpoint is further explored in Cao Yan's research, where Li Biqing's initiative to transform *achi mugua* into a background score for school extracurricular activities is discussed (Cao 2012).

Li Xuehua, another national-level inheritor of *achi mugua* is the subject of investigation in Zhu Dingyu's study (Zhu 2019). Zhu explores how Li, as a cultural inheritor, engages with government projects, introduces *achi mugua* into higher education, and maintains his humble persona amidst these roles. Through these case studies, Zhu demonstrates Li's flexible identity negotiation and adjustment in different contexts.

While the successful designation of *achi mugua* as cultural heritage has opened up significant opportunities for its preservation and development, several scholars express concern over the potential drawbacks. Yang Yang, for example, points out that the unique dances of other Lisu areas risk being overshadowed by the prominent focus on *achi mugua* of Tongle Village. Furthermore, she criticises the current modes of promoting *achi mugua* as being too commercial and singular in their approach. Lastly, in their master's theses, Yang Xi (2015) and Zhang Lihua (2018) conducted comprehensive analyses of *achi mugua* taking into account various factors such as its ecological environment, performance recordings, music and physical features, as well as interviews with inheritors. Notably, they all bring an anthropological perspective to the research, though like other scholars, a primary focus remains on the most renowned performers from Tongle Village and the inheritors Xiong Ziyi and Li Biqing.

Other Topics

The inheritance and development of Lisu music and dance have consistently been primary topics of interest among researchers. Numerous scholars, through observations and interviews with inheritors, have portrayed the status quo, opportunities, and challenges that Lisu music

and dance face (see further Yang 2018, Yi 2018, Su and Luo 2021). These studies provide insights into the impact of modernization and globalization on Lisu music and it's evolution as traditional Lisu lifestyle and culture encounter outside influences. Despite its rich cultural and musical heritage, Lisu music confronts several challenges. These include the erosion of traditional musical knowledge and skills, as well as the decline of traditional musical instruments. Various efforts have been launched to document, promote, and revitalize traditional music and thereby safeguard musical heritage. Such initiatives include music festivals, cultural exchange programmes, and music education programmes.

Introducing songs, discussing instruments and dances, and conducting musical analysis has formed the primary focus of many Chinese scholars' research (Yang 2006b, Tang 2014, He 2016, Lou 2017 and Sun 2018). Yang Yuanji also published many introductory and analytical articles on Lisu music and discusses the issues of rejection and retention of traditional music in the context of modernisation (Yang 2006a, Yang 2006b and Yang 2007). In addition, it is worth mentioning that both western-trained and Chinese scholars have shown interest in Christianity and the music of the Lisu. Aminta Arrington took research about the hymnody of the Nujiang Lisu as her Ph.D. dissertation topic (Arrington, 2014). Ying Diao also completed her Ph.D. with a study of contemporary musical practices of the Christian Lisu in Nujiang Prefecture in northwest Yunnan on the China-Myanmar border (Diao 2015). The scholars Shi Ying (Shi 2014), Zhao Lei (Zhao 2010), and Li Nana (Li 2013) have also contributed to this research content.

Moreover, great progress has also been made in the collection and collation of Lisu music. A noteworthy accomplishment is the anthology of Lisu music published in 2012. This compilation encompasses an exhaustive array of Lisu folk songs, folk instrumental music, folk dance songs, and dances from five regions: Nujiang (Yang 2012), Baoshan (Li 2012a), Dehong (Cao 2012), Lijiang (Xu 2012), and Weixi (Li 2012b, Lin 2012 and Zi 2012). Work like this provides rich resources, which include recordings, videos, and musical scores, and offers essential insights into the classification, practices, styles, tonal patterns, rhythmic structures, and melodic characteristics of Lisu music. However, it is important to acknowledge that these studies tend to show a certain level of homogeneity, which may not align entirely with the reality of the diverse and complex musical landscape of the Lisu people.

I would like to illustrate this discrepancy through my personal experience. Before embarking on fieldwork, I extensively reviewed a variety of representative literature concerning Lisu songs and accumulated a wealth of materials. However, upon commencing the field research, I discovered that many transcriptions I had collected previously seemed inapplicable. While interacting with local individuals, I would bring these musical scores and inquire if they could sing the songs in question. In reality, the situation was quite complex, for example not only did the documented songs often differ significantly from those sung in the different communities, but renditions also varied among community members. Furthermore, the musical atmosphere and habits seem to have changed quite a bit in the last decade or so. The following example of wine songs illustrates this.

Lisu wine songs are the genre of music that appears most frequently in Lisu daily life. When gathering with friends and family, the host usually enthusiastically brings out some high-alcohol wine (sorghum liquor) to entertain the guests and they sing together as soon as they are happy. “There are no manners without wine” is just one of several proverbs which signal the importance of wine culture in the Lisu culture. The Lisu have a lot of conventions when it comes to such drinking. Li Jiao classified wine songs into three types: welcoming wine songs (迎客酒), narrative wine songs (叙事酒), and wedding wine songs (婚礼酒歌), and introduced the corresponding habits separately.

> Three or four rounds of wine are consumed during the meal. In the opening round, the first cup is used to toast each other; the second cup is the linked-arm drink; the third cup is taken with an arm around each other’s neck—a more intimate linkedarm drink. The second round is the “the wine from same heart” (同心酒). The host and guest put their arm around each other’s neck and shoulders, and face-to-face drink from the same cup of wine. The most enthusiastic is the third round called “Three Parallel Rivers” when two toasting girls offer toasts, one sitting on each of the guest’s legs. The three are face-to-face as they drink a glass of wine. The one cup of wine flows into the hearts of three people, so it is called “Three Parallel Rivers”. (Li 2012: 8)

The enthusiasm of the Lisu people was vividly portrayed in this description. I was quite surprised when I read this passage, as despite I attended numerous banquets as a guest, I have not experienced two girls (or boys) sitting on my legs or seen any other guest treated in this way. The Lisu people do not seem to engage in this practice very much anymore. As my consultant Li Ting told me, “This custom is not a good influence on our reputation. We want

to be as decent as you Han Chinese and strive to be polite. We used to do this only to men, not usually to girls, especially a lovely girl like you." I observed that although they seldom partake in this tradition now, they have developed new ways to express their hospitality. For example, when guests are seated and drinking, two people will stand on either side of the guest, each holding a container filled with wine. They will then slowly pour the wine into the guest's glass from both sides as a gesture of respect. Simultaneously, the guest is expected to drink at the pace of the pouring to show appreciation; otherwise, the wine might overflow, which would be undesirable.

Reflecting on the above, the musical culture of the Lisu ethnic group has been receiving attention since the 1950s. In less than a century, research has progressed from societal investigations to the collection and collation of music, to music analysis, and most recently to studies from anthropological and sociological perspectives. However, despite these advancements, there remain certain areas of shortfall. Firstly, a thorough examination of the primary literature reveals that researchers studying Lisu culture are predominantly not of Lisu origin. Therefore, their understanding and interpretation of Lisu culture and associated terminologies largely hinge on their own perspectives, or on the translations and explanations offered by other non-Lisu scholars. This scenario leads to subtle variations in the translation of many Lisu terms, and often results in inconsistent designations and interpretations. Such discrepancies, to some extent, distort the original intent of Lisu culture or diminish the accuracy of the representation.

Secondly, there is an over-generalization and homogenization in research. A review of past studies reveals a tendency among researchers to classify the music of specific Lisu regions, or even specific villages, into a few genres or styles. These regional or local characteristics are then projected onto the entirety of Lisu music, creating an oversimplified and potentially misleading narrative. This authoritative explanation recorded by experts can inadvertently eclipse the true diversity and depth of Lisu musical culture.

Thirdly, there is an observable trend among some scholars to use Western musicological analysis and the Han pentatonic scale to analyse Lisu music. Such an approach tends to overlook the fact that Lisu music and dance possess their own unique practices and wisdom that do not neatly align with these external frameworks.

In sum, existing research on Lisu musical culture can lack balance and holism, and sometimes does not fully respect indigenous perspectives or acknowledge the subject's

inherent rich complexity. This exact shortfall has become the impetus for the present inquiry. This study aims to delve into these neglected aspects, endeavouring to bring about a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of Lisu musical culture.

Chapter 3 Singing Everything about Life: Indigenous Knowledge in Lisu Song

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is about how Lisu people embody the music they sing and perform, thus expressing their own lives as well as the natural environment in which they live. This chapter emphasizes insights generated from local knowledge, as well as focusing on local genres and local epistemologies, rather than relying solely on the analysis and interpretation of musical phenomena solely from an external theoretical perspective. Nevertheless, it is not only about the role of the songs and the stories of Lisu people, but also about how these people and their songs shaped me as a person and scholar.

I have chosen three related phrases mentioned by locals to elaborate on three aspects of Lisu songs. The first phrase, “Sing Everything About Life”, is concerned with the performance of Lisu songs and related local knowledge in Lisu villages. The second phrase is “Grasping the Essence of Lisu Songs for Urban Survival”, which points to the experiences of Lisu singers, their creative experiences, and their situations in the city. The third one is “You need to be more subtle and sing everything metaphorically”, and this pertains to the expression of lyrics, performance techniques, and customs related to Lisu songs.

3.2 “Sing Everything About Life”

3.2.1 Meeting Li Sizhi

The first time I met Li Sizhi was a sunny morning, the day after I settled into Li Guiming’s home. She is Li Guiming’s mother and was already 83 years old when we met. She was very skilled at singing, and as a result, villagers often invited her to sing at any village activities, festivals, weddings, and other events to add to the festive atmosphere. Li Guiming had described her as a vibrant and chatty individual, a characterization that I found to be true as soon as we met.

Despite the language barrier between us—I had not yet mastered the Lisu language, and her understanding of Chinese was limited, we found joy in conversing with each other through

animated gestures and expressions. Intrigued by my presence, Li Sizhi was eager to learn why a young girl like me had not ventured off to the city for work and was curious about my purpose there and my family. She took great delight in sharing anecdotes about her family and indulging in the village's latest gossip. In turn, I found myself captivated by Li Sizhi's extensive family, her enchanting stories, and, of course, her beautiful music.

At Li Sizhi's home, as with most of the dwellings in the village, the traditional *muleng house* structure and hearth has still been preserved. Even though it was March, the high altitude ensured that the temperature plummeted as soon as the sun dipped below the horizon. Li Sizhi usually would invite me to join her within the warmth of her hearth after dinner, where we sipped tea and engaged in lively conversation. These moments, enveloped in the cosy atmosphere, swiftly made me understand why the Lisu people were so fond of gathering around the hearth after dinner, drinking and singing. Inevitably, these moments became the most treasured parts of my days while living in Jishui Tang village, Baohe Town, Weixi County.

I watched as the smoke rose through the hearth and escaped through a small hole in the roof of the house. This building with the hearth is made of fluted wooden pillars that looked like the spokes on an umbrella, the distinctive characteristic of a *muleng house*. Local people told me such a home is was simple to build by sawing twenty or thirty pieces of wood to a height of more than two metres, peeling off the bark, and sharpening one end so that the tips could be gathered together facing the sky. The other end of each wooden pole was spread out evenly against the ground, like countless dancing legs, forming a large rectangle or triangle, and then the outside of the *muleng* house was thatched with a fence to keep out the wind and the cold, and the process was complete. I loved living in the *muleng* house, which had a small hole at the top of the ceiling that acted as a natural passage for smoke escaping from the fire. At night, I used to peer through this hole at the stars. Only a few stars could be seen from here, but they were so bright they resembled oil lamps on the summit of the house.

Perhaps it was the flames in the hearth that warmed her whole body. When the fire in the hearth went out, the charcoal's face turned grey instead of red. I noticed two chunks of charcoal standing erect, as if they were bored with our talk and waited for me to guess what would happen next. Li Sizhi told me that Lisu poeple were very respectful to the fire gods. No matter how difficult the journey, brightness and warmth were always present. She also used to drizzle some animal oil onto the fire, and it was said that Lisu ancestors enjoyed the

scent. Sometimes we would grill meat on a stove set up over the fire, allowing the meat's juices to drip into the fire. However, people were not allowed to spit, spill water or throw unclean things into the fire because there is fire god in it. These were rules that Lisu have known since they were children (Li Sizhi, personal communication, Jishui Tang Village, 14 March 2021).

> My mother is like a child, always curious about new things. Just the other day, some government workers visited our village to assess the progress of poverty alleviation efforts. She took the opportunity to ask them about various targeted poverty alleviation terms and chat with the younger people. But, as you know, the poverty alleviation team has a lot of work to do and is always in a hurry, so they rarely have a chance to stay and talk with my mother. Our children and grandchildren are all away at school or busy with their own careers, which leaves her feeling quite down. Now that you are here, it's great she has some company. (Li Guiming, personal communication, Jishui Tang Village, 10 March 2021)

As Li Guiming put it, his mother felt quite lonely at home, since he and his wife both worked in the county town during the day. Usually, by the time he returned home, his mother had already eaten dinner and gone to bed. Her other children, as well as her grandchildren, were all working or studying in other cities. As a result, she rarely had the opportunity to talk to anyone at home. Her mood had visibly deteriorated since her husband passed away five years ago. In fact, I really enjoyed the way she referred to me, especially in Lisu language, "an dai li ma, nu a ke sha yi zha" (Oh, my granddaughter, you're so adorable). Likewise, following the village's custom, I was happy to call her "Granny." In my second week at this home, we celebrated the Lisu festival—the Cattle New Year. Her real grandchildren took time off school and work to return home. Once back, the young people turned on the television and engaged with TikTok in various ways, chatted on WeChat, played games, and occasionally exchanged a few words in standard Mandarin. Although the children did not interact much with her, she still wore a beaming smile and even burst into song, filled with joy.

That was the first time I heard Li Sizhi sing. Although she was one of the most extroverted and lively women I had met among the Lisu, she still possessed the typical shyness of Lisu women. I had tried encouraging and urging her to sing before, but without success. While her grandchildren were around, and she was in high spirits, I asked her again, "Granny, could you sing another song for us? Look, the children love listening to you!"

> **LI SIZHI**: I don't know how to sing, you know.

> **KEYI**: But you just sang so well! They told me that you have loved singing since you were young and you're really good at it. Look, everyone has gathered around to listen!
>
> **LI SIZHI**: Oh, don't listen to their nonsense, I don't know how to sing. (She chuckled shyly.)
>
> (I look at her great-grandson Hu Xuezhong. He quickly explained to Li Sizhi in Lisu language, "She (Keyi) wants to hear you sing *mugua*." He laughed heartily.)
>
> **LI SIZHI**: Oh, I thought you wanted me to sing the kind of songs young people like nowadays. I don't know how to sing those. My granddaughter, my voice is not beautiful now, but it was pretty good when I was young. (She sheepishly covered her mouth and smiled.) (Li Sizhi and Hu Xuezhong, personal communication, Jishui Tang Village, 20 March 2021)

This was not the first time I faced the challenges of translating language and concepts, as well as effectively communicating within the context of an interview. Clearly, Li Sizhi and I had different understandings of music; for her, singing ancient tunes was not considered an act of singing, while the popular songs sung by young people were. In contemporary times, Lisu youth receive education within the context of Han culture and are influenced by mainstream Han culture as well as the surrounding ethnic minority cultures. Their musical preferences encompass a diverse range of songs. While their song lists do include a small number of popular Lisu songs, a considerable proportion of the songs they listen to are those in the Chinese language. These Chinese songs primarily consist of popular tracks circulating on the internet or Chinese-language compositions created by musicians from other ethnic minority groups (see further Xiong Yonglin's song list in appendix). Ethnomusicologists have regularly found and explored disjunctures between local conceptualizations of "music" and those provided by the Western setting in which the discipline of ethnomusicology emerged.

For instance, Wachsmann explored the connection between the human psyche and sound, proposing a tetradic schema to be applied to both music and speech, which offers a comprehensive model for understanding universals in music (Wachsmann 1971: 382). Kenneth Gourlay challenged the concept of "music" as defined by Western-educated scholars or arising with the formation of an elite. He emphasized that groups (like the Lisu people) in non-industrial societies engage in a form of creative expression that encompasses music, dance, drama, and ritual, which is used on occasions of heightened emotion when speech is inadequate. He further supported two alternative conceptual hypotheses "The first is that 'music' (in the sense of particular sound configurations) is inseparable from a broader affective channel, and in consequence, the proper subject matter for investigation is this channel itself. The second is that 'music' (in the same sense) is inseparable from the occasion

and purpose for which it is produced" (Gourlay 1984: 35). Helena Simonett provides a more recent example, analysing Yoreme people living in northwest Mexico who apply the concept of music, as understood in a Western sense, exclusively to the sones (tunes) played on string instruments (harp and violin) which were introduced to the remote northern regions of the Viceroyalty of New Spain by Jesuit missionaries in the early seventeenth century (Simonett 2014: 111-112).

Encounters like this guided me to explore the question, "What is the concept and significance of songs and music for Lisu people in their traditional cultural context?" With this aim in mind, I continued living with the Li family and investigated surrounding Lisu villages, hoping to gain a deeper understanding of Lisu perspectives on music by immersing myself in their daily life experiences. Through this exploration, I moreover aimed to uncover the subtleties of their musical expressions and appreciate the views, meanings, and values they attributed to their songs and music.

3.2.2 Life Story Song

After a month of my stay there, I had become more familiar with Li Sizhi, her family, and the village. During this time, I often worked alongside her in the fields, taking care of animals, gathering firewood on the mountain, and cooking. She seemed livelier and more open, sharing stories about the Lisu people and herself during breaks or while resting, even singing these stories when she was in a good mood. I remember one evening when Li Guiming and his wife called to say they were busy with work and would not be home for dinner. Li Sizhi, her oldest daughter (Li Cuiying, whom I usually called "big sister"), and I built a fire in the wood stove inside the house and started eating *baba*.[12] Li Sizhi tore off some *baba* and rolled it up to feed the hens in the yard. Li Cuiying cut the meat into pieces, sprinkled salt on it, and grilled it over the fire. The aroma of the meat began to fill the air. We sipped homemade sorghum liquor, watching the sunset and twilight through the window. Li Sizhi began to sing.

I could sense that granny was in a good mood that day, so I gently asked her if I could film during the break after one song. She agreed quickly but with one condition: she wanted to dress up in a proper Lisu costume first. (Figure 3.1).

[12] *Baba* is a traditional flatbread made from wheat or corn flour enjoyed by various ethnic minority groups in Yunnan Province, China. Its preparation and ingredients may vary slightly among different minority groups.



Figure 3.1 Li Sizhi singing in Lisu attire, Jishuitang Village, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

I have one sister and two brothers,
There would have been another sister and brother.
But my sister got sick one year,
Not only did the disease take her away,
But it also took away my mother, father, and little brother.
They died one by one, leaving behind young children.
I was only three years old, and my eldest sister was eleven.
I have no memory of how she raised me and my two brothers.
I can't imagine how hard it must have been.
…

I met my children's father when I was 14 years old.
We didn't have enough food at that moment,
so we ate yams, millet, and buckwheat.
I have a total of nine sons and daughters.
We didn't have enough food because life was so difficult.
We ate grass roots and tree bark while fighting field mice and digging for groundnuts.
However, we still were unable to feed the youngsters.
Finally, two children passed away.

We weren't given land until after your elder brother was born[13],
Regardless of the sufferings and humiliations,
We were able to raise our seven children on our own,
despite all the challenges and humiliations.
Despite the trials and humiliation,
we were able to raise our seven children on our own.
When our eldest kid became ill, the pleasant days came to an end.
My son died in pain [2008].
Oh, how my son suffered!
The coffin that his father had prepared for himself was given to the oldest son.
He was in anguish and hid in his room every day,
pretending to be someone else.
He drank every day, no matter how much I chastised him,
or how hard the kids tried to persuade him.

He kept telling us he only had seven years to live.
He was bedridden for several days in his sixth year.
He eventually died….

When the song reached this point, elder sister choked up, and upon seeing this, Li Shizhi also began to sob uncontrollably, unable to continue singing. At the time, my Lisu language skills were not sufficient to understand the lyrics. Later, I played the recording to Li Guiming, who helped me translate it from Lisu to Mandarin. Therefore, I did not know what to do when granny and her daughter suddenly started to cry. I quickly turned off the recording device, sat beside granny, embraced her, and attempted to ask what had just been sung, and why the song was so wrenching. As elder sister comforted her mother, she explained the general meaning of the song to me. She said, "Every time I hear this tune with those heart-wrenching lyrics from mom, it takes me back to when our father had just left us, and it's just so crushing" (Li Cuiying, personal communication, Jishui Tang Village, 5 April 2021). During my interviews, similar accounts often arose: it seemed as if the act of singing didn't just provoke a superficial reimagining of memories, but instead made them genuinely palpable. Stéphane Aubinet points to this phenomenon when he investigated *yoik* melodies of *sami*:

> Thus, engaging with the past generally implies "making present" in both senses of the term – temporal and spatial – by evoking a distant place, as if the past itself was invisible but still within reach, hidden but not lost. (Aubinet 2023:108)

When I attempted to ask Li Shizi and Li Cuiying about this song, I did not receive a detailed answer. Li Cuiying only said that this was not the first time she had heard her mom sing this

[13] Referring to Li Guiming was born in 1978

song. She could not recall when she first heard it, but it might have been while sitting by the fire just like we were at that moment, singing songs and sipping tea or wine.

This time, instead of further questioning Li Sizhi and Li Cuiying about what I initially perceived as "music," as I had when I first began my fieldwork, I took a different approach. As mentioned earlier, our understanding of music was quite different. Whenever I asked her about music-related topics, she might talk to me about people in her life, events, or even the food she ate and the fruits and vegetables she grew. Therefore, this time, I tried to turn the conversation to "tea" (lajia in Lisu language), something they often mentioned, hoping to engage us in a dialogue that would help soothe the lingering sense of sadness.

> The lajia we drink is different from what you usually drink, this is called Big Tree tea. It needs to be boiled over low fire for a few minutes to drink it. I couldn't live without it although sometimes I have to build a fire just to get a bowl of tea.… And when you drink it, you need to put a little salt and a piece of cooked pork with a bit of fat in it…. It's so cold here in the mountains that it takes up a lot of energy, so not only does this taste better, it's also better for your body. (Li Sizhi, personal conversatiom, Jishui Tang village, April 2021)

If drinking around a hearth is the most common occasion for music to happen, then sipping tea near a hearth comes in second. In fact, I could understand the habit of gathering around the hearth to drink tea in winter. However, the Lisu people living in the mountains do this all year round, regardless of whether it was winter or summer. Even when they do not need the fire for warmth and the weather is hot, villagers still brew tea over a fire. Perhaps the energetic function Li Sizhi described is the reason, as I often saw it prepared and consumed in other local people's homes. According to Li Guiming, this is a type of large-leaf tea that primarily grows at elevations of 1,000 to 2,000 meters. They usually bring it from Dali, Yunnan, not only because it is affordable but also because it has a great taste. As Li Sizhi previously pointed out, the main difference between this tea and other green and black teas available in the market is that these leaves are even larger and thicker, requiring boiling to be drinkable. Furthermore, it needs to be simmered over low heat, allowing the beneficial elements in the tea leaves to be fully released and bringing out the tea's unique flavour.

In fact, it took me quite some time to get used to the taste of tea with added salt and meat, and I gradually began to appreciate the "better taste" and "healthier" aspects that Li mentioned. I found that the tea seemed to have a slightly astringent and bitter taste, but the added salt and meat flavours neutralized its bitterness while also imparting more depth of flavour. More importantly, the slow brewing process facilitated most of the conversations and interactions

between Li Sizhi and me, and it also provided a welcoming space for Li Sizhi to host countless visiting friends and relatives. Particularly in the winter, the warmth of the hearth is unmatched by any other electric heating devices. We would huddle around the fire during the long winter days, making tea, sharing stories, singing songs, talking, and joking – perhaps this is the essence of the Lisu people's "tea culture."

> The salt in our tea is very important to us, we have a saying, "People cannot live without eating salt, people cannot live without making *mugua*." … We do *mugua* when we're happy and when we're sad, no matter what we're doing. (Li Sizhi, personal conversation, 17 April 2021)

Li Sizhi's words brought to mind Ashicai's perspective, a renowned Lisu singer in Lijiang and Weixi regions, who said about singing for the Lisu people being a "spontaneous" and "emotional expression" that doesn't require any deliberate effort. It's a "natural occurrence" that comes as easily as having a conversation, "just like talking" (Ashicai, personal communication, Lijiang City, 18 December 2020). It is worth noting Li Sizhi use of the verb "do" in this context, which once again reflects the Lisu people's concept of music as an activity. To gain further insight, I consulted Han Gang, a scholar who studies the Lisu syllabic script in Weixi. He explained:

> The Lisu vocabulary is relatively limited compared to Chinese, with no more than 1,000 words in total. The categorization of verbs is not as detailed as in Chinese. In Lisu, there is no separate verb for "sing." Instead, they use the word for "do" as a substitute for the concept of singing. (Han Gang, personal interview, Weixi County, 29 April 2021)

Almost every Saturday morning, Li Sizhi would cheerfully inform me that her favourite granddaughter Li Xueli and Hu Xuezhong were returning to see her. I was happy from the bottom of my heart as well: I rarely get to talk to the youngsters during the weekdays and was starting to feel like a left-behind child in the village. Like granny, I looked forward to everyone returning to the village each weekend. I chopped the firewood we'd probably need, and she went to a neighbour's house to buy freshly slaughtered pigs. We made a fire and tea. While we were drinking our tea and looking at the path leading up to the village from outside, Li Sizhi began to sing:

> What day it is, I don't know,
> We are so happy, so joyful.
>
> We are happy to see each other,
> We are happy to meet each other.

Let's sing as we see each other,
Let's dance as we meet each other.

3.2.3 Monkey-Snatching Corn Song

April was the season for spring ploughing, and in those days, villagers rise early and work late in the fields on the mountainsides. "Listen, the cuckoo birds have started to sing. We need to sow all the seeds before the spring rains arrive", said Hu Xuezhong (personal communication, Jishui Tang Village, 11 Aril 2021). Li Sizhi's family was no exception. Friends and relatives who usually came over for a drink and chat had been missing for several days. Li Guiming's family also had land, but both he and his wife worked in the county. As his mother Li Sizhi grew older, the responsibility for tending to the family's land had now fallen on elder sister Li Cuiying and her son, Hu Xuezhong.

One morning, after finishing breakfast, I heard Li Cuiying and Hu Xuezhong calling for me from outside Li Sizhi front door. They said they wanted to show me their land. Before leaving, they specifically advised me that the mountain paths were rough and dusty, so I should wear old, comfortable clothes and shoes. Upon arriving at the destination, I couldn't help but chuckle as I realized they were genuinely swamped with work and in desperate need of my "expert" assistance to plant corn. They had thoughtfully prepared a straw hat, gloves, a hoe, and a basket (for seeds) for me to use while working. In fact, I had seen everyone busy with spring ploughing in the previous days and had held back my usual requests for interviews, offering instead to help with the farmwork. Initially, my hosts had been hesitant to involve me, fearing I might get too tired, but the need for an extra pair of hands had overwhelmed their caution, although they'd still carefully proposed the day as being about showing me the land and ensured I dressed well for work by mentioning dusty paths.

In reality, the actual process of planting corn proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. The difficulty lay in the poor geographical conditions of the mountainous terrain. The incline was steep, with a gradient of approximately 45 degrees. Moreover, the soil was dry and hard, with weak adhesion, making it quite easy to lose footing and slide downhill. During a break, I expressed my admiration for their perseverance in farming under such challenging conditions. However, Li Cuiying said the real test lay in the tasks that followed, such as fetching water for irrigation, maintenance, and many other responsibilities. Even after overcoming these hurdles to finally witness the maturation of the corn, they still had to

contend with the mountain monkeys who would swoop in to snatch their hard-earned harvest. "Those monkeys, they come in swarms. They grab with their left hand, snatch with their right, and even cradle some corn in their arms. And if they can't carry any more corn, they'll still pluck some more, take a few bites, and then toss them away" (conversation with Li Cuiying, 11 April 2021). As she spoke about these pesky monkeys, she was quite irate. As she spoke, her frustration grew so overwhelming that she suddenly began to sing:

> In April's embrace, we sow the seeds, monkeys love it all.
> In the month of May, seedlings green, monkeys cheer and call.
> In the month of July, tasselings sprout,[14] monkeys roam and creep.
> When August comes, corn grown right size, monkeys start to intercept.
> In the month of September, golden corn, we must guard and keep.
> You guard the head, monkeys sneak to the centre,
> You guard the centre, monkeys slip to the tail.

3.2.4 Genres of Lisu Song

The tune sung by Li Cuiying struck me as both familiar and unfamiliar. I recognized the unique vocal quality and overall tone of the song, as well as some ornaments familiar from other traditional Lisu singing. However, the melodic progression seemed to be that of a new tune. To illustrate this more directly, I have transcribed the tune sung by Li Sizhi when narrating her *life story* when we sat by the hearth (Figure 3.2), and the one sung by Li Cuiying about monkeys coming to grab the corn (Figure 3.3).

[14] Tasselling is an early stage of the corn growth period.



Figure 3.2 Transcription of the Life Story Song. Transcribed by Keyi Liu.



Figure 3.3 Transcription of song about monkeys coming to grab the corn. Transcribed by Keyi Liu.

The songs are similar in that each features a solo female voice, syllabic style, similar range (6th to 8ve), and use of an identical set of pitches—anhemitonic pentatonic with sol as the main cadence point (to better compare the tunes, I transposed both to end on G). The most immediate distinction between these two tunes is that the first has smaller melodic fluctuations, and demonstrates repetition of the same outline, with each one-bar phrase consistently falling to G, and individual melodic variation arising probably from fitting the text onto the melodic template. Although each line in the second tune also ends on G, it showcases greater metrical variability and a more flexible melody. Compared to that in Fig. 2.2, the melody in Fig. 2.3 was noticeably more "pleasing, with ups and downs, and the pitch is higher and the timbre brighter" (Li Xueli, personal communication, Jishui Tang village, 10 April 2021).

In fact, in many scholarly analyses of the Lisu people in the Nujiang region, a basic classification principle is followed in which "Lisu folk songs are divided into *mugua*, *baishi*, and *youyi*" (Li 2021: 59-63), namely ancient tunes, mountain songs, and love songs. Moreover, Lisu folk songs were listed among the first batch of state-level masterpieces of intangible cultural heritage announced by the State Council on 20 May 2006 (Guowuyuan Bangongting 2006). In accordance with a tendency in Chinese literature to classify folk songs in terms of content and function, Lisu folk songs were also introduced by scholars in similar ways, with categories including marriage-escape songs, house-building songs, new-year songs, and hunting songs (Zuo Yutang 1999: 103-14; Lisuzu Jianshi Bianxiezu 2008: 215).

Although such sources reflect an apparently unified understanding of Lisu songs in the academic world, the Lisu'slengthy routes of migration, and their cultural and geographical diversity, mean that Lisu people living in Lijiang and Weixi regions do not utilize such a classification method. In their descriptions, in contrast, they note a clear difference between the first kind of "doing song" and the second, which can draw on many tunes, without fixed names, that locals refer to casually as "wa rua ra da ci ga Ben ga (tunes sung on the mountain)" (Xiong Zhifeng, personal communication, Kangpu Town, 15 January 2021), or even as "simply an impromptu melody that will soon be forgotten" (Li Cuiying, personal communication, Jishui Tang village, 11 April 2021). Locals often said to me that, "The tunes we sing at home are different from the ones we sing outside, and some tunes can only be sung outside" (Li Sizhi, personal conversation, April 10, 2021).

> At home, especially around the hearth, elders usually sing songs about ancestral stories, past events, or serious matters. These tunes are ancient, and the lyrics are in an old language,

> similar to Classical Chinese for the Han people; some of them, I don't even understand… When there are significant events at home, such as weddings, funerals, or sacrificial ceremonies, a *nipa* is invited to sing *mugua* and chant scriptures. During these occasions, we definitely cannot sing the casual tunes we usually sing on the mountain, as it would be considered disrespectful. The songs we sing on the mountain are usually about love, or simply happy tunes for enjoyment. (Cai Yuping, personal conversation, Louhai Village, Guanghua Town, 29 November 2020)

To further understand the tunes and song classifications in these two regions, I interviewed many folk singers and ordinary villagers. Only a few people could discuss their views on this matter, and each had their own perspective, reflecting a strong personal understanding, with diverse and non-uniform views. For example, Li Zhenkun, who was nearly 70 years-old and a widely recognized *gapa* (a skilled male singer) in Liming town, explained:

> Here, we don't have any fixed definitions for song classifications like they do in the Nujiang area. If we really need to classify them, they can be divided into *mugua bu*, *mugua yin*, and *mugua gua*. These are very ancient tunes passed down from the past. Among them, *mugua bu* and *mugua yin* can only be used in old *mugua*. In folk songs and minor melodies, *mugua gua* is mainly used, for instance, for singing love songs, drinking songs, songs about chance encounters, lullabies, and so on. *Mugua yin* has a more elegant, gentle, and smooth tune, while *mugua gua* has more ups and downs. These tunes can also be mixed when singing. (Li Zhenkun, personal interview, Liming Town, Lijiang City, 30 October 2020)

For the majority of villagers in Lisu villages, it was nearly impossible to answer questions about tunes or musical aspects of songs, such as: which song are you singing, when you are in the mood to sing, how do you pick the tune? Their focus was on the content of the song whether the lyrics were interesting, and the specific story, sentiment and locations conveyed by the song. I heard the same melody sung by different people with lyrics that applied it to a greeting song, a drinking song, and a song for pig herding. Many melodies circulating in the community did not have a fixed name, except for a few particularly famous ones. If there was any discussion of the tune, it typically involved curiosity about Lisu tunes from other regions, asking, "Which region's tune are you singing?" (Li Xueli, personal communication, Jishui Tang Village, 6 April 2021).

In his study of Suyá songs, Seeger pointed out that speech, instruction, song, and invocation were the four key terms in understanding how the Suyá distinguished different genres of songs and other vocal art forms, with each type corresponding to different occasions and thematic content (Seeger 2004:26-7). Although the Lisu people cannot directly apply this Suyá model, their approach to categorizing their vocal expressions seems to have some parallels. Lisu songs are also determined by the occasion and the themes being sung. The

difference is that in the context of Lisu culture, the “instruction” and “invocation” forms among the Suyá people are mostly performed through song. In addition, there are also long historical narrative songs and some serious songs, usually sung by elders or *nipa* at home. In such songs, as shown in Figure 3.2, the melody is relatively simple, repetitive, low and based mostly on stepwise progressions. Sometimes, lyrics are performed as chants, i.e., with a strong rhythmic delivery but no melody, a mode of delivery that emphasizes the content of the lyrics; see further Chapter 5 on the performance of *nipa* and elders in wedding ceremonies. Songs sung outdoors and in the mountains are much more casual and free-spirited. The Lisu people have an old saying, “When words fail, express it through song.” Just like speaking, anything they see, hear, think, or feel can be sung.

3.2.5 Resonance

Although ordinary people may not utilize much verbal explanation for the musicality of their singing, some general consensus can be observed through observation. For example, a melody is not arbitrarily assigned to someone or something; ideally, the melody is supposed to be sound like what it evokes (Aubinet 2023:85). In the context of the Sami people, what is evoked could be an animal or a place. For the Lisu people, resonance can be a song story, an event, an emotion, an object, or a person, or some combination of these. According to Tony Schwartz, a package of stimuli may have no meaning in itself, but resonance can occur when the stimulus package evokes meaning for an audience or viewers (Schwartz 1974:25). Resonance may be a key to what Lisu songs express. Whether it was Li Guiming recalling his childhood when he heard Li Sizhi singing, or Li Cuiying crying when she heard Li Sizhi singing stories about the past, the very real feeling of the difficult days of the past came rushing to each listener. Having laboured in the fields, when I heard the song about monkeys coming to grab the corn, I felt empathy for the very limited resources and challenges faced by the villagers, as well as guilt that as a Han person from a wealthier region of East China I had been able to grow up distanced from these hardships.

In such a context, experience, and shared experience, becomes particularly important. Living with the Lisu people allowed many such questions, especially those that I could not directly explore through conversation with Lisu people, gradually to become clear. For example, why is the process of drinking Big Tree Tea so complicated but so popular among the Lisu living in the mountains, and why do Lisu people like to gather around the hearth and sing about the

past and the future all year round? Moreover, as I found myself increasingly intertwined with the protagonists of these questions, the enchanting melodies of the Lisu songs stirred within me a growing wave of newfound emotions.

3.3 "Grasping the Essence of Lisu Songs for Urban Survival"

In the previous section, I depicted the singing and understanding of music primarily from the perspectives of ordinary Lisu individuals in a mountain village. In this section, I mainly explore the experiences of Lisu singers as they transition from agricultural and pastoral lifestyles to semi-professional singing careers. Additionally, I will discuss their understanding of Lisu songs, songwriting experiences, and the current state of their professional lives. In fact, the Lisu people did not have professional singers who made a living from music in the past. Even in the Lisu language, there is no word for "singer." Instead, they generally referred to them as "*gapa*" (men who are good at singing) or "*gama*" (women who are good at singing) (Ashicai, personal communication, Lijiang City, 21 November 2020). The development of Lisu singers in urban settings and the professionalization of this skill occurred after 2000, influenced by the emulation of Han singers and the substantial demand for this profession in Lijiang as a tourist city. It is necessary to clarify that in this part of the chapter, the Lisu singers I describe all self-identify using the Chinese term "傈僳族歌手 (Lisuzu geshou, Lisu Nationality singer).

3.3.1 From Herdsman to Semi-Professional Singer

In 2015, Ashicai released an album titled "Dancing Sanjiang 3," which features Lisu songs and *maniu* dance music created by Ashicai and performed with his apprentice, Arong. This album contains many classic tracks that remain highly popular among listeners and are regularly performed nowadays. A distinctive feature of Ashicai's albums was their light-hearted and lively Lisu dance music style, which has become his trademark and earned him the nickname "Happy Ashicai."

The first time I met Ashicai, he seemed a bit shy and introverted. He didn't talk much, mostly staying silent and listening intently to others. Despite this, I found this slim man to be genuine and down-to-earth. Perhaps it was his unique long, curly black hair that most caught my attention at first. As I got to know him better, I discovered that he became a completely different person when immersed in music. Whenever he sang or played the *maniu*, his emotions would instantly be stirred by the music's atmosphere, and his music immediately raising the moods of all those around him. This is probably why everyone affectionately calls him "Happy Ashicai." What I never expected was that behind his happiness, there was an extraordinary story. He could be considered one of the first Lisu people to emerge from the remote mountainous regions and one of the first Lisu singers to embark on this musical journey. To understand his creations and music, we need to delve deeper into his past, as his experiences, to some extent, represent the journeys of many contemporary Lisu singers.

> The Lisu people usually marry quite young, with girls often becoming mothers at just 15 or 16 years old. But my mom had me when she was 20. So, they gave me the name "20" because I was born when she was 20 years old. Later, when I came to the city, I chose a Chinese stage name, Ashicai (Chinese 阿石才), since it sounds like "20 才 ("cai" means "until" in this context. ["20 cai" implies that it wasn't until his mother was 20 years old that he was born]). When I was five years old, I was playing in the mountains and accidentally got injured, causing my left eye to go blind. My family was too poor, and there were no medical facilities in our village. We couldn't borrow money to seek treatment in the city either, so my left eye is still damaged. Due to poverty, I had to drop out of elementary school after the fifth grade and started working on the farm at home. That's why I can't stand seeing children not attending school for any reason. I'd rather pay their tuition fees myself to encourage them to go to school. I don't want Lisu children to suffer like I did any more.
>
> When I was 11 years old, I once attended a funeral of an elderly person in my village. I remember that the family had invited several *maniu* masters to perform tunes at the funeral, playing their instruments for three days and nights until the ceremony was over. I was particularly fascinated by the tunes they played on the *maniu* and listened intently. During one of their breaks, I approached one of the masters and asked if I could try playing the *maniu*. This was my first time playing it, yet I played the melody they had just performed. Everyone was amazed. Then I went home and called up the courage to attempt it for the first time, persuading my mother to use the family savings to purchase the old man's *maniu* and begin working on it myself. Therefore, I had a lot more fun herding pigs and sheep, and I tried to play animal's sound on the *maniu*.

> I've been married twice. However, both marriages ended in divorce, because I had to travel constantly to perform *maniu* at ceremonies, which made it impossible to stay at home. Back then, I was penniless and had to support my intellectually disabled older son and my clever, younger son. To pay off the debts incurred due to illness, I had no choice but to entrust my older son's care to my elder sister, while my younger son and I led a nomadic life. Those times were so difficult that I don't even dare to think about them now. With no income in the village, I began trying my hand at performing wherever I could. In every village I visited, I had to explain my family situation and why I was wandering with my child. My Lisu brethren in villages were sympathetic. They would give me 30 or 50 cents in change, or a few eggs if they were moved by our singing and wonderful *maniu* tunes. We travelled all over the nearby towns and villages after almost three years of this, and I can't remember how many performances we did. I don't even know how we managed to get through those difficult times. I felt sorry for my son; once, when we were out, he got lost and his foot was permanently injured. As for me, I completely lost my hearing in my left ear after falling ill. However, it was during this time that we gradually became well-known in the region – a father and son who sang, danced, and played *maniu* wherever they went.
>
> In my thirties, I finally caught a break when I received an invitation to work at the cultural station in Liming Township. In the early 2000s, I got a job at the Dongba Valley Ethnic Cultural Ecological Park in Lijiang city, primarily performing Lisu culture for tourists visiting the area. From that time, I began taking on apprentices and led young people who loved singing but were impoverished and without prospects to develop their careers in the city. Since the establishment of the Lijiang Lisu Cultural Research Association in 2009, I have been devoted to Lisu cultural work and was selected as a province-level inheritor. Every year, I followed the research group to visit various locations, learning about the culture of Lisu compatriots living in different places.

The research association Ashicai mentioned is an NGO organization dedicated to studying Lisu culture. In Lijiang the Naxi ethnic group form the main minority population, which has made the cultural development of the Lisu people there extremely challenging. In the words of the president, Li Wenqin, they were "surviving in the cracks." Ashicai and Zhu Lifan, among others, were a group of Lisu singers and cultural inheritors whom Li specifically gathered with the hope of providing a platform for their development while also stimulating their initiative and enthusiasm for cultural inheritance (He Wenqin, personal communication, Lijiang City, 27 October 2020).

Ashicai's life story and experience was a typical example of a local Lisu singer developing into a semi-professional singer. It not only reveals the realities and harshness of Lisu life but also unveils some cultural logic within traditional Lisu society, clearly demonstrating the choices, responses, and growth of Lisu singers amidst limited resources and complex changes in the present day. From his story, it was clear that as a young boy, he would pass the time while herding by playing the *maniu*, imitating animals and the environment, which laid the foundation for his playing techniques and creative material. As an adult, he travelled to various festivals and ceremonies, performing a variety of tunes for clients, including wedding tunes, house-building tunes, and funeral tunes, which allowed him to accumulate a vast collection of traditional Lisu melodies. Later, facing financial difficulties, he was forced to wander and perform, gaining valuable performance experience. Then, Ashicai has actively passed on his experiences to numerous apprentices, promoting the emergence of new functional patterns and spaces for the transmission of Lisu music in daily life. After joining the research group, Ashicai participated in multiple fieldwork in various Lisu communities. This not only provided Ashicai with a more comprehensive understanding of the Lisu culture across different regions but also broadened his perspectives on teaching and cultural communication. All these experiences contributed to his rich creative repertoire and also made him one of the few people capable of explaining Lisu music culture through verbal discussion and theorization.

3.3.2 Songwriting Experiences

Ashicai's early experience of leaving the mountains and venturing into the city to make a living is a microcosm of the journey many Lisu singers have taken, and it is also reflected in his songwriting itself. The most common method he uses involves imitating the sounds of nature and animals. Many studies concerning indigenous peoples' singing, provide examples of this same approach. Among the Kaluli people of Bosavi, for instance, bird and other non-human sounds are incorporated into song texts, thereby enabling Kaluli singers and their listeners to develop unique relationships with their surroundings (Feld 2012). Richard Keeling studied some of the Yurok's animal songs, such as the Song of Black Chicken Hawk. This song is based on the chicken hawk, known as a swift fighter and elusive target. Before battle, the singer would sing this song with its melody imitating the bird's distinctive call as a symbolic expression of being unassailable (Keeling 2012: 236-7). The Suyá too compose songs that are distinct in every aspect, such as rhythm, melody, lyrics, voice quality,

syllables, and actions, all of which are closely related to the specific animal they are singing about (Seeger 2004: 41-42). Among the indigenous Sami people of Norway, there are many experts in animal yoiks. The author shares an anecdote about his experience of learning to sing like a fox:

> Whether this improved my singing, I cannot say. But it did help me to focus, to feel some sort of "foxness" in the tones, and to take pleasure in singing. The issues with animals such as the fox, I thought then, is that they tend to be absent most of the time, making it difficult to observe them. Imagination seemed the best way of retrieving their *luodda* and the fox I visualized was perhaps simply a better "score" than the one I had written down. By participating in courses with Sami yoikers, did I learn that this effort of imagination was a crucial part of the activity of yoiking (Aubinet 2023: 93).

The Lisu people have a talent for drawing imaginative inspiration from the world around them, particularly from the sounds of nature and animals. For instance, Li Biqing, from Weixi County, is renowned for his exceptional goat-themed singing. As a result, he was selected as a national-level inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of *Achi mugua* and has taken on his own apprentices. His extraordinary ability to imitate goat calls stemmed from his years spent herding goats in the mountains, making him intimately familiar with their behaviours, expressions, and vocalizations. At times, his imitation was so convincing that it was difficult to distinguish him from the goats when he stood among them (Figure 3.4). The intensity and frequency of the vibrato in the goat's cry can vary based on factors such as the goat's age, breed, and individual temperament. Overall, the mountain goat's cry, with its high-pitched, bleating sound, is notable for its distinctive vibrato, which is produced when the vocal cords vibrate rapidly. In fact, I could completely relate to his actions, as I too found myself irresistibly drawn to imitating the bleating of goats when I encountered them in the mountains. It is hard to explain why I was so captivated by this engagement in imitation: was it a sense of unity with the animals and nature, or maybe it stemmed simply from the sheer enjoyment of mimicking the goats' calls. By incorporating the goats' cries into his singing, Li Biqing not only added richness and interest to his songs but also infused his work with a sense of authenticity and connection to the environment. This immersive experience transported his audiences to a world where they can feel the vivid bond between the artist, the animals, and nature.



Figure 3.4 Goats in Weixi, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

The second method adopted by urban Lisu songwriters like Ashicai and Zhu Lifan is the adaptation of Lisu traditional tunes. Lisu singers I interviewed recall growing up listening to the older generation sing around the hearth, an experience deeply embedded in their memories. Many Lisu legends, values, and teachings are subtly conveyed through these songs. Lisu singers weave these ancient songs into their creations, akin to how Yothu Yindi, as observed by Aaron Corn, frequently incorporates traditional themes and materials, thereby reconnecting local audiences with their culture and the ancestral values and practices that underpin society (Corn 2010:100). In such contexts the primary focus is on the lyrical content sung by the performers, but in recreating such performance materials for listeners in urban centres some transformation is applied: Li Ting, a young generation Lisu singer and songwriter, for example, said:

> In some *mugua* songs, some tunes don't have much melody; the main focus is on the lyrics. The nicer melodies are mostly sung when talking about love or during herding. For example, my song *Amilai, ni bie ku* (my girl, don't cry) is based on a tune my mom used to sing when she was expressing her love.… When creating Lisu songs, you can't sing as high-spirited and freely as my mom, as it wouldn't fit with the song accompaniment, so the melody has to be more structured, like a normal popular song. I came up with the melody for *Amilai, ni bie ku* … when my mom was singing, and I was playing guitar beside her, trying to find a few chords to blend with her singing. With the chords, I played and hummed, then the melody came out. (Li Ting, personal communication, Huping County, Lijiang, 5 January 2021)

In addition, the popular tunes in each village or different hilltop settlements vary, providing a rich source of inspiration for migrant singers in the urban setting. Ashicai is passionate about collecting and studying these tunes when he conducts field research, stating, “I enjoy interacting with local people and sharing with each other. Afterward, I create new melodies and singing styles based on the different tunes from various places” (Ashicai, personal communication, Lijiang City, 25 November 2020).

A third approach in songwriting involves drawing inspiration from dance accompaniments. Lisu dances are usually accompanied by various instruments, and in the Lijiang region, the Lisu people favour the use of *maniu* (see Chapter 4 for more details). The songs offered by Li Sizhi and Li Cuiying in the first part of this chapter were unaccompanied but Ashicai, with his experience playing the *maniu* since childhood, is particularly skilled at adapting *maniu* dance tunes into songs.

> We are a people who love singing and dancing. When people hear joyful tunes, they know it's the Lisu people. Our dance music is so lively; I wondered why our songs couldn’t be as cheerful? So, I imitated the rhythm and melody of the dance music and turned it into songs.... I didn’t have any particular creative process; when I got excited from dancing, the songs came out naturally. As you can see now, everyone really loves such songs. (Ashicai, personal communication, Lijiang City, 25 November 2020)

In addition to the three common sources of inspiration for Lisu singers’ composing, they also employ various strategies to both solidify the distinct characteristics of Lisu songs and appeal to modern audiences, including non-Lisu groups in urban settings. For example, they frequently blend Mandarin with the Lisu language, particularly using Lisu words repetitively in the chorus, thereby enhancing the Lisu style’s recognizability while preserving their language. As Du Yaxiong notes, music constitutes a crucial cultural element of each nation, often more resilient and conservative than language. He illustrates this with the example of African Americans, who, despite not speaking African languages for centuries, have maintained significant elements of African music in their contemporary musical expressions (Du 2023: 243).

Moreover, these singers skillfully merge traditional Lisu musical elements with contemporary styles, akin to what indigenous singers globally are doing. Hughes and Keith explore the case of Taiwanese Amis singer Kaolo, who utilizes her traditional language in music to combat the threat of cultural erosion. She adeptly integrates Amis legends, rites, and beliefs into contemporary musical forms, demonstrating a fusion of heritage and modernity (Hughes and Keith 2012: 186, 189). Like Kaolo, Lisu singers like Ashicai, Zhulifan, and Liting employ

modern music production techniques with minimal technological intervention to create a sense of immediacy and authenticity. That is, they generally avoid using audio effects, such as digital reverb and equalization, and there is no audible pitch correction, adding to the apparent sincerity of vocal sound and emphasizing the importance of vocal expression and song content.

Another challenge faced by Lisu singers in creating and promoting their music is that of target audience. Li Ting ran a music bar which closed down due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to reduce his living costs in the city, he chose to return to the mountains, focusing during his free time at home, on the Tik Tok and Kuaishou platforms, which are both live streaming and short video apps. Li's efforts were not in vain as he received 300,000 Kusishou followers, an enormous number of fans as compared to the size of the Lisu community. Compared to equivalent Han singers, he had about one-tenth the followers and insufficient earnings from these platforms to fully support himself. To attract a larger audience, including Han Chinese viewers, he struggled to incorporate elements they would like:

> I ran into an embarrassing situation: The Han Chinese were uninterested when I spoke in Lisu or sung Lisu songs in my live streams, and they probably could only stay on my page for one or two seconds before closing it.… In order to attract Han Chinese viewers, I have to interact with the audience in Mandarin and sing some of songs I wrote in Mandarin, or even perform some popular Chinese pop songs. You know, many singers are live streaming these days, and their singing techniques and streaming equipment are much more advanced than mine, so I can't really compete. What's more, when I use Mandarin, my Lisu fans were not satisfied and kept leaving comments asking me to speak Lisu language and sing Lisu songs. So, sometimes I really don't know what to do. (Li Ting, personal interview, Huaping County, Lijiang, 5 January 2021)

Aside from the ongoing challenges previously mentioned, such as composing music and identifying target audiences, a more significant challenge arose during my fieldwork—the outbreak of the pandemic. Under China's zero-infection policy, it has had a tremendous impact on everyone's lives. In the following section, I try to figure out the survival strategies of Lisu singers during the pandemic.

3.3.3 Professional Lives Prior to and Under Pandemic Impact

Famous as a UNESCO Heritage Site, the Old Town of Lijiang, had approximately 6000 hotels and 1500 music bars in 2019. This thriving tourist site formed a highly competitive environment for migrant Lisu musicians. For Lisu singers, competition was fierce, as they

found themselves up against many already resident singers, some of whom had gained recognition through participation in various music talent shows. The Lisu singers tried to find temporary gigs at bars, and formed a large WeChat group where they shared information about available opportunities. Sometimes they had to perform at multiple venues in one night, while other times they might not get any gigs at all (personal communication with Li Ting, Huaping County, 5 December 2020).

To play to their strengths, many incoming Lisu singers chose to perform at "hearth restaurants" owned by well-known Lisu singers. The hearth in these venues is modelled on a traditional Lisu hearth used for cooking and heating, still utilized by the Lisu who live in the mountains today (Figure 3.5a). The Figure 3.5b shows the adapted hearth in Ashicai's restaurant, which is used to cook hot pot and barbecue meals. In this setting, Ashicai played *maniu* or sang for his customers during their meal. In order to cater to customers from different ethnic groups, he usually hosted the shows in Chinese or sang some Lisu songs in Chinese. Sometimes, to keep the customers engaged, he would occasionally teach them some very simple Lisu foot dances. Although Ashicai was worried about his poor Chinese, he was delighted and proud to be able to share some of the Lisu musical culture with other ethnic groups (personal communication with Ashicai, Lijiang, 8 March 2021).



Figure 3.5a Lisu traditional hearth Photo by Keyi Liu in Lijiang, 2020.



Figure 3.5b modern hearth table in Ashicai's restaurant

These venues provided alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and food, but their most attractive aspect for their customers was the Lisu ethnic group's distinctive music and dance performances. Zhu Lifan identified two primary reasons for this: first, to generate some income for themselves; and second, to help Lisu compatriots by addressing their employment issues to a certain extent (Zhu Lifan, personal communication, Lijiang City, 29 October 2020). Zhu further commented:

> In our Lisu culture, whenever there's a big event, we gather together to celebrate by drinking, singing, and dancing. Back in the village, there weren't really any restaurants. Instead, people would set up tables in the host's yard for everyone to gather. Of course, our urban dance bar and restaurant is a bit different from what we had in the village. In a Lisu village, things are much more open; everyone is in the courtyard, eating, singing, and happily getting up to dance. In the city, as you can see, my place has a stage where we usually perform, and non-Lisu guests mostly sit at their tables, eating and watching our performance. However, if Lisu friends book the entire place, it gets really lively! They walk around, interact with us, get up on stage to sing, and make it an incredibly fun experience. (personal interview with Zhu Lifan, Lijiang City, 3 November 2020)

Ashicai added his own overview as follows:

> I have released many albums and received numerous awards, so people often assume that I am wealthy. In reality, this is a significant misunderstanding. Perhaps you don't know that, although I currently have a job, my main source of income still comes from performances, and I continue to live frugally, carefully budgeting every expense. My albums rarely have designated copyrights, and for me, purchasing copyrights is actually quite difficult. Producing an album these days requires at least 100,000 yuan. Whether I'm releasing albums or engaging in other forms of art, my primary goal is to promote our Lisu culture. As long as I can achieve this objective, having copyrights or how much I earn is not important.… You know, many people who come from the mountains struggle to find work, and life is tough for them. In 2018, we opened this restaurant together so that everyone can increase their income and improve their living conditions to some extent. (personal communication with Ashicai, Lijiang, 8 March 2021)

However, the good times did not last long, as China experienced an outbreak of COVID-19 at the end of 2019. Due to the government's particular focus on high-risk tourist cities, tourism in Yunnan Province was mostly prohibited during the outbreak period, and the local economy and people's livelihoods were severely damaged. It was reported that more than one-third of hotels and music bars in Lijiang closed down for various reasons. Figure 3.6 shows two contrasting photos of Lijiang's Old Town before and after the outbreak.



Visitor volume for daily operation for pre-Covid

The ancient city under the influence of the epidemic

Figure 3.6 Contrasting photos of Lijiang's Old Town before and after the outbreak, 2020. Photo by Keyi Liu.

Amidst the slump in Lijiang's tourism industry, Ashicai's restaurant struggled to stay afloat and, regrettably, ceased operations entirely after its lease expired. In addition, Ashicai could no longer find commercial performance in Lijiang work due to the government's successive prohibitions on gatherings of 10 or 15 people or more during most of this period. This clearly contradicted the Lisu people's belief in a lively atmosphere shared by the more people, the better. Although Ashicai had feared that his income would be entirely cut off, in fact, many Lisu couples who initially planned to hold weddings in the city returned to their villages to organize traditional Lisu weddings instead. In the mountainous areas, it seems, the enforcement of policy was significantly reduced. Ashicai found that more and more people began inviting him to different villages to attend their weddings, housewarmings, or events. Especially since November 2020, when the Lisu wedding season began, his schedule became packed and he travelled tirelessly between different villages (see chapter 5 for more information about Ashicai's wedding performances).

Lisu singers like Ashicai, Zhu Lifan, and Liting, who had come to the city to make a living in preceding years, found it exciting to be able to return to the familiar mountains to perform. This opportunity seemed to be a silver lining amidst the misfortune of the pandemic. Based on their interviews as well as my personal observations, I have summarized the differences and pros and cons of their performances in villages and cities as follows:

1. They enjoy performing for their own communities once again, meeting different Lisu communities and getting into close personal interactions with their fans. Performance in a Lisu village involves the blurring of boundaries between performers

and audience, stage and auditorium, and the time when the performance starts, and ends blurred.

2. The format and content of village performances are far more varied than those in the cities. In cities, there is a high rate of repetition of daily repertoire, because of the need to consider the needs of customers. In the villages, the singer can perform directly to fellow Lisu without catering to the preferences of other nationalities. They can even host the entire event in Lisu language without worrying about speaking Chinese poorly. In terms of singing, the vocalist can perform solos as well as engage in antiphonal singing with others present. Furthermore, in the village, the crowd can engage in more challenging dance steps with the crowd than in the city and play a wider repertoire of mouth organ tunes. In the city setting, on the other hand, repertoire was quite repetitive, as musicians found that tourists and fans loved hearing the songs for which each singer had become well known.

Urban migration has provided new sites where aspects of cultural tradition can be creatively reformed and find the approval of new audiences. While Lisu singers have energetically explored new opportunities in this way, the impact of Covid restrictions has had the side-effect of reversing rural-urban migration and reinvigorating rural cultural life. Musicians who returned to the villages found themselves pleasantly surprised as to how much they enjoy playing for their own communities once again.

3.4 “You Need to be More Subtle and Sing Everything Metaphorically”

3.4.1 Journeying to the Mountain Village

Although the villages I visited are not far away from one another on the map, because of the mountainous terrain, a one-way trip of five hours is normal. I actually quite enjoyed these journeys with my Lisu friends. Along the way, the lack of a phone signal is a common experience, so these five hours provide the perfect scenario for me, the driver, and other passengers to immerse ourselves in listening to music together and chatting (which is to say, for me to progress my fieldwork). I often travelled in Lijiang area with Xiong Yonglin, Xiong

Lixian, and Xu Ligang. In their car, the songs played were usually traditional and popular songs of the Lisu and other minority ethnic groups around them. Our listening was focused on a USB disk drive full of recordings of their favourite songs, some of which they had bought and others they'd downloaded from a computer with. Here, I am extremely grateful to Xiong Yonglin, as he gifted me with a USB disk with the playlist of songs he often listens to in his car. "This USB disk contains all the Lisu songs and dance songs I have collected over the years from everywhere. Whenever I hear a song, I like or a new song from a Lisu singer, I will go and find it to save it on the it" (see Appendix 1 for Xiong Yonglin's playlist).

Xiong Lixian's sister was getting married and Xiong had come to Lijiang city on 6 December 2020, the day before the wedding, to handle various wedding-related affairs. Before he left Lijiang, he was responsible for taking several guests back to Haibaluo Village for the wedding itself. Public transportation between the city and surrounding towns and villages is extremely inconvenient, and there is almost no public transportation from the city to Haibaluo except for private cars. Basically, Lisu poeple working in the city who want to return to the village have to take the car of a friend who is also returning to the village or seek a private car that offer rides (similar to a ride-hailing service). At 2 pm, Xiong Lixian came to pick me up. In the car, there was already a woman from the same village who was working outside Haibaluo and going back to attend the wedding. Getting into the car, Xiong happily said to me: "This time you're in luck, I invited several friends who are involved in music, and tonight we'll all have a great time together! Let's go pick them up now."

Xiong's other passangers turned out to be Ashicai and Wang Wei, who was carrying a guitar on his back and two heavy speakers in his hands as he walked out of his residential area (due to epidemic control, outside vehicles are not allowed to enter residential areas freely, but people could enter or leave as long as they pass a health and ID check and provide a trip code). During the first part of the trip, our conversation was largely based on the music being played in the car. When the track of a certain Lisu singer was played, Xiong Lixian proudly introduced the singer and shared some interesting stories of experiences he had shared with singers. As he noted, I found that most Lisu ethnic group singers are relatively approachable and interacted readily with people just like ordinary people, without presenting a so-called "singer aura."

As we drove out of Lijiang and into the Deqing area, we stopped to take a break by the side of the road. Upon entering this Tibetan area, the architecture around us started to display

Tibetan characteristics, such as buildings being primarily red, white, and black in colour, and being large and grandiose in appearance. “These colours come from the soil and are purely natural pigments. Unlike the Lisu people, they use all their wealth to build houses and keep their food simple, while we tend to spend more on eating and drinking, and our houses are relatively simple.” Just as Xiong Lixian was explaining this to me, a modified BYD car drove up from behind and honked at us.

The car slowed down, and the sound of upbeat music could be heard coming from its open window. A wild and youthful energy wafted toward us. Li Ting, a young man in his twenties poked his head out, smiling as he called out to Xiong Lixian “Brother Xiong, you’re driving too slowly. We will go ahead first! Haha!” No sooner had the words left his mouth than he stepped on the gas and sped away.

He was one of the young singers invited by Xiong Lixian. Xiong told me that Li Ting’s mother was a very good singer from Huaping Tongda Township, and perhaps influenced by his mother, Li Ting was one of the few young people who could still sing Lisu ancient tunes. He had even been known to duet with the village’s nipa. My companions explained that people always think that singing ancient tunes and duets well is quite challenging. The activity tests a singer’s ability to create lyrics on the spot, which not only requires a good structure but also involves literary creativity, since the implied meaning must be interesting and vivid. In a duet, it also tested whether both parties could sing in response to one another. I asked, “Is it like a couplet?” “Not exactly,” Xiong Lixian explained, “It is mainly about who can use metaphors better. You will understand when they sing tonight.”

3.4.2 Metaphor

At dinner, we sat together by the fire. Drink had been provided, and Abasang (Ashicai’s second son) was sitting next me, greeting and toasting each of the three guests with some words in song. When it was his turn to greet me, he sung: “you are the best flower the wind blows in the window; I am the most inconspicuous of the green leaves. What kind of fate brought this beautiful flower to here?” Ashicai told me that I was being welcomed as an honoured guest. “This is the most basic metaphor. The flower he just sang about represents you, and he compared himself to the green leaves. If he used very straightforward words, it would be less interesting and embarrassing to say,” he noted, “so when singing, you need to

be more subtle, and sing everything in *metaphors*; otherwise, it won't work. It's just like poetry (conversation with Ashicai, 8 March 2021).

The word metaphor comes from the ancient Greek verb *metapherein*, which at its most basic connotation denotes a shift or transfer of meaning. From a rhetorical point of view, and according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, metaphor involves a contrast between two different things, and is a fundamental feature of poetry, where it falls into several contrasting types, including metonymy, metonymy, allegory and symbolism (see further, Rice 2003: 163-4). Western definitions of metaphor may not have influenced the formation of similar concepts in Lisu expressive culture, but in fact one of Aristotle's thoughts on metaphor provides a key into understanding the relationship between poetics and metaphor in Lisu songs:

> In his *poetics*, Aristotle famously states that "the greatest thing by far" for a poet is to be a master of metaphor: "It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius [euphyía], since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars."(Kroupa 2015)

Yet if metaphor in its broadest sense has a simple structure with the basic sentence form being "A is B", it is worth mentioning that certain metaphors avoid identifying a direct target, requiring the listener to rely on their grasp of proverbs, idioms, or norms within the cultural system for unambiguous decoding. After he had sung a toast to the guests, Abasong then sang:

> Brothers and sisters from afar.
> Sisters and brothers from afar,
> When we meet today.
> When we meet today,
> Just like the fish see the water,
> Just like the wind sees the flowers.
> We burned a caterpillar,
> We caught a butterfly.
> Let's raise a glass to good fortune,
> We wish our friends and guests happiness and good fortune!

The words “burned a caterpillar” and “caught a butterfly” function in this way. It was only after hearing them frequently that I thought to ask a Lisu consultant how they comprehended these terms.

> The words we sing in our songs need to be very subtle and beautiful. For example, the word “killing” a pig today sounds too direct and rude, so we like to say “burn” instead.… In addition, the pig is an animal that we have raised for so long and we have a bond with it. My mum could not bear to watch and listen to the howling and struggling of the pig before it was killed. She usually goes far away and comes back when we have finished killing it. So, we wouldn’t sing about killing it, we’d use “caterpillars” instead. (personal interview with Li Xuehua, Songping Town, Yongsheng County, Lijiang, 19 December 2020)

By the same token, “caught a butterfly” in these lyrics meant “killed a chicken.” After that, in interviews and informal conversations, I began to pay attention to metaphors in Lisu songs. I was able to collect a number of Lisu metaphors and proverbial usages. For example, the killing of a cow would be sung as “using an anzailai”,[15] an egg would be described as a “white pebble”, and giving birth would be interpreted as “bearing fruit”, and so on. It’s interesting to note that the Lisu people frequently choose target domain based on everyday observations of plants and animals.

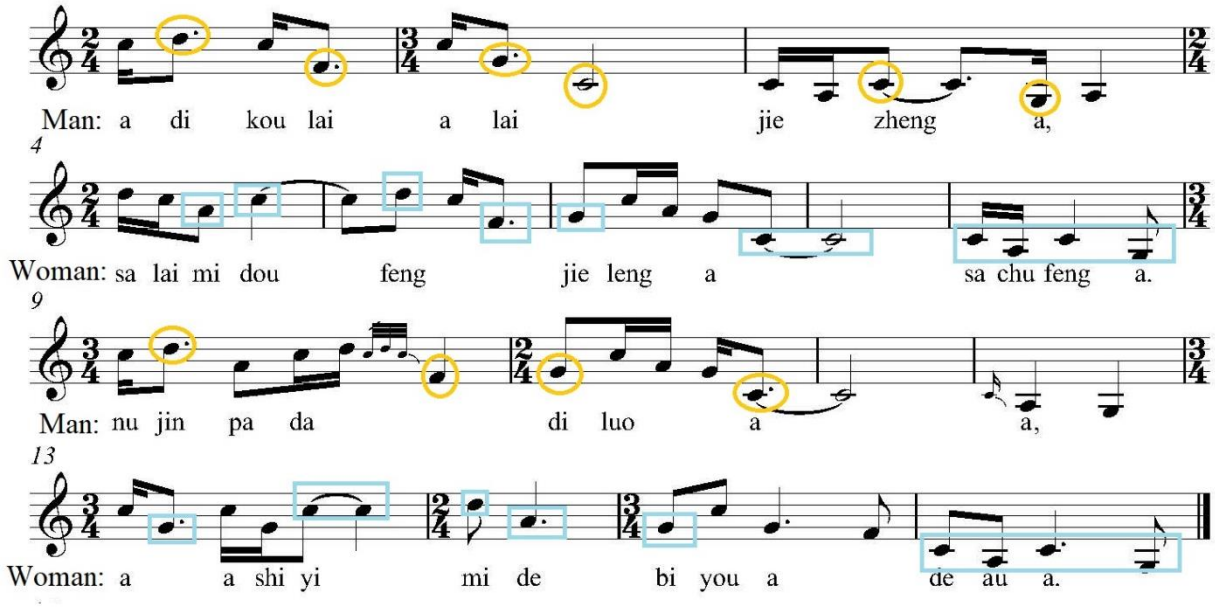
This is not to suggest that metaphors in Lisu song are all immediately and directly available in everyday life. Some metaphors appear to have become stylised, particularly while singing in duet, as He Shengwei explained to me:

> The person who sings well in antiphonal singing is respected by everyone in the village, and the lines he sings beautifully will be sung frequently on specific occasions. For example, when you would like to express that the other person’s words have warmed your heart, you can sing: “The seeds of the gourd are in the gourd so that the seeds will be full; the seeds of the pumpkin are in the shell so that the melon will ripen.” If you would like to express that you are very sad in your heart you can sing: “The bees feel cold when they see the flowers die, the bud feels pain when it caught by the bees.”
>
> There used to be a lot of fantastic singing like this. When I was a child, I used to listen to the older generation sing and was often touched by what they were singing. Nowadays, aside

[15] The anzailai (Chinese: 土鳖虫) is the eupolyphaga sinensis, a species of wingless, flightless cockroach in the genus Eupolyphaga, native to Western China and Mongolia.

from the fact that you don't comprehend it, fewer and fewer young Lisu people understand it, let alone sing it. (He Shengwei, personal interview, 27 December 2020).

A final example illustrates the way singers may explore a metaphor together in a duet performance. It was lovely evening, and the hospitable Lisu people are again enthusiastically preparing dinner: fires were built, chicken stewed, and wine poured. Not only was I looking forward to this familiar process, but I was then able to help them making a local dip that would be served with the meal. I chatted with everyone while we ate, not purposefully leading the conversation to music. I was waiting for an atmosphere, a time to liven up the shy Lisu people - a slightly drunken state. I recalled a former occasion when I couldn't wait to suggest a song just a little while into the feast but found that the singer looked embarrassed. Luckily, Li Wenlin, who was sitting next to me, promptly explained that Lisu people are easy to embarrass and that singing needs the right atmosphere so that the singers are in the mood to spontaneously sing a beautiful song. A slight drunken state is exactly the atmosphere and mood that was required, and so this time I waited more patiently as everyone relaxed under the influence of alcohol. Around the table, a man and a woman begin to duet:



Transcription Note: The yellow circles respectively marked the same notes in the first melody line of the male and female duet, while the blue rectangles marked the same notes in the second melody line.

Figure 3.7 Transcription of Love Song. Transcribed by Keyi Liu.

Man: I have been walking all over the mountain and walking through the ravine.
Woman: where were you going? What ditch did you walk into?

M: I have come to your mountain; I've come to your ravine.
W: Did you come to my mountain to find what? What brought you to my ravine?

M: I came to your hill to look for vegetable seeds, and to your ditch to find vegetable seedlings.
W: I have not spread vegetable seeds on my mountain, and I have not planted vegetable seedlings in my ravine.

The song is sung as a duet in three verses, but the melodies are similar, therefore I just transcribed the first verse. The melodic tonics of these two phrases have been indicated separately with an orange circle and a blue square. As transcription demonstrates, the melodic tonics are consistent, despite changes in melodic direction and rhyme caused by the two singers' distinct ornamentation, padding words, and voice. This may be one of the fascinating things about traditional Lisu folk songs; even when a singer repeats a song, you will hardly hear the same melody and lyrics. In terms of lyrics, at least this time I wasn't so naive as to think that this was a song about vegetable planting, and I fully grasped the man was courting the woman. In this verse, however, the woman had not accepted his confession yet. Typically, she will not respond enthusiastically at the beginning. Instead, she prefers to continue testing the man's duet-singing ability until he convinces her. Despite the fact that there isn't a single word or sentence about love, this song is full of implicitness and appeal.

That is to say, the songs often describe something that seem to have no connection with the singer or the immediate scene. Lisu singers use objects to metaphorize events, events to metaphorize people, and events to metaphorize principles. In the end, the various metaphors selected will still return to themes that relate to the singers' memories or wishes in the particular context of the act of duet singing.

3.5 Conclusion

Lisu friends told me there is significantly less singing in their surroundings now than in the past. For me, comparing life in the villages to that in the city, I was still able to form an impression of ever-present singing in the former location, whereas in the city music mostly comes from music players, electronic devices, or karaoke and other settings. In the mountain villages, people start singing while talking, eating, drinking, herding, and they even hold significant conversations in the form of sung duets. They sing whether they are happy or sad, not to mention during festive activities. Singing remains an integral part of their daily lives; if it weren't for deliberate attention, one might not even notice it.

Lisu individuals often attribute their inclination towards singing to their inherent shyness and self-perceived inadequacy in verbal expression. However, the powerful emotions conveyed through their songs surpass the limitations of language, transcending verbal barriers and providing a deeper insight into their experiences of cultural identity and their personal aspirations. On the contrary, more often, it is I who felt shy and embarrassed, having studied music for so many years, yet unable to sing freely anytime and anywhere, as they could. For the Lisu people, singing serves as an emotional outlet and a means of social cognition; it is a way to develop reciprocal relationships with one another and with spiritual and other non-human entities (for examples from elsewhere in the world see Magnat 2020; Robinson 2020); it allows them to recall and sustain their law, history, and medicine (see also Roseman 1991); in certain settings it is a superior form of speaking, offering a broad poetics that encompasses the world all around the singer.

Chapter 4 The Soundscape of Love and Nature: Exploring the *Chuchu* and *Magu* Jew's Harps and the *Qiben* Lute

4.1 Introduction

Among the Lisu people before recent urban migration, there is only a slight division of labour. With the exception of differences between the sexes, everyone performs the same basic tasks related to agricultural work and animal husbandry. Even the few specialists, such as the blacksmith, the nipa (Lisu traditional healer and shaman), and the village headman, participate in the daily routines common to all villagers (Larsen 1984:44). Similarly, the Lisu do not have professional musicians. This is still the case for those living in the mountains today. In the context of traditional Lisu culture, musical instruments serve as entertainment during leisure time, and there is not even a concept of the "musician." Of course, there are individuals who are particularly skilled at playing certain instruments. When they are recognized by the community, they may be called "*maniu* mipa" (a man who plays the *maniu* well), "*qiben* cepa" (a man who plays the *qiben* well) or *ga* pa (a man who sings well). If the individuals are female, the term "pa" should be replaced with "ma" in their titles. However, it is noteworthy that even though both genders engage in these activities, men have historically been more readily recognized for their efforts. These talented musicians may be invited to play at ceremonies or events to provide accompaniment for dancing and to enhance the festive atmosphere.

Before I go on to discuss the emotional expressions of instruments, their connections to the natural world and contribution musical instruments make to dance accompaniment, I will first concisely introduce Lisu instruments themselves and relevant existing research. Concerning the musical instruments used by the Lisu ethnic group, some of the earliest documented sources include an investigation of the Lisu in southwestern China was conducted by the Yunnan Ethnic Minority Social History Research Group from 1956 to 1960, which was later published in *A Brief History of the Lisu* (Lisuzu 1983), and Larsen's study of Lisu music in northern Thailand (Larsen 1984). Both sources briefly recorded the shapes, forms, and melodies of the musical instruments used by the Lisu people at that time, and it can be seen that most of these were used similarly between the Lisu people in northern Thailand and those in southwestern China.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Lisu musical culture has garnered increased attention and some genres of Lisu dance have been selected as county-level, provincial, and national intangible cultural heritage. This has led to more studies concerning the instruments used by Lisu people in the southwestern region of China, including design, playing techniques, associated tuning knowledge, and folklore (see further, Wu 1994; Zhang 2006: 107; Zhou 2009:21-26). However, it is regrettable that there is still no monograph specifically dedicated to Lisu musical instruments.

One of the primary instruments is the Lisu lute, known among the Lisu people from southwestern China today as the *qiben*. As of now, no comprehensive or authoritative research has been conducted on the origins or variation of the *qiben*, which exists in both three- and four-stringed formats.[16] The *qiben* recorded in *A Brief History of the Lisu* and that mainly used in Weixi, Lijiang, and other places has four strings,[17] while local musicians in Nujiang, Lushui and in the Dehong region (Li and Lü 2005), all of which are to the south of Weixi, and those in Thailand use the three-stringed *qiben*.

Larsen mentioned that the *qiben* used by the Thai Lisu was influenced by the Chinese folk instrument *sanxian* (1984:46),[18] and musicians in Weixi told me that "the musical instruments of the Lisu people who migrated southward were influenced by the *sanxian* and they gradually began to use the three-stringed *qiben*. In fact, the *qiben* originally had four strings, and this is the version we have always been using here" (Li Hu, personal communication, Pantiange Village, 16 June 2021). I conducted fieldwork interviews with local musicians in Lushui and Nujiang, they did not have much to add on this, saying, "We use the three-stringed version here, and some other Lisu people in other places also have a four-stringed version, but I am not sure about the specific differences" (Yang Bofu, personal communication, Liuku township, Lushui city, 19 March 2019). .

In the regions I studied, specifically in the Lancang river and Jinsha river basin, and apart from the *qiben*, the Lisu people primarily use instruments known (in Lisu) as *jülü*, *chuchu*/*magu*, *maniu*, and *jizi* (Figure 4.1). Each area has its own distinct instrumental styles and favourite instrument, which Larsen also discovered in the northern of Thailand

[16] Due to regional variations in Lisu dialects, *qiben* is also known by different names such as *chiben*, *qibo*, or *qiboer*.
[17] In fact, the term documented for *qiben* in this book is *pipa*, the term used by the Han Chinese to refer to lute-form instruments of this approximate shape. This reflects that the researchers at the time named and wrote about the instrument from the perspective of the Han Chinese.
[18] The *sanxian*, literally "three strings," is a three-stringed traditional Chinese lute.

(1983:43). In brief, the *jülü* is a bamboo flute, *chuchu* and *magu* are jew's harps, the *maniu* is a mouth organ (also known as *apubi* in Lisu language and *hulusheng* (葫芦笙) in Chinese), and the *jizi* is a bowed stringed instrument with two strings. The *jülü*, *magu* and *maniu* are commonly played by numerous minority groups in southwest China, while the *qiben* and *jizi* are distinct instruments predominantly found within the Lisu. Although the *qiben* and *jizi* look similar to other bowed and plucked instruments, there are significant differences in their construction and playing methods. For instance, the main distinction between the *qiben* and the *ding* (a four-stringed lute) of the Bulang people is that the *ding* has a fret on the neck while the *qiben* does not.



Figure 4.1 Instruments used in Lisu of Weixi and Lijiang area. Photo by Keyi Liu, 2021.

In this chapter, my objective is not to deliver comprehensive descriptions and explanations of each individual instruments. Instead, I explore village practices and customs highlighting the characteristics of these instruments within the context of Lisu culture, delving into the expressive role of musical instruments in the lives of the Lisu people. Firstly, I examine how the Lisu employ instruments as a means of communicating and expressing their emotions. I explore the relationship between the tonal nature of the Lisu language and the instruments' capacity to imitate speech to demonstrate how the Lisu people use their instruments as extensions of their language and a medium for self-expression. Secondly, I examine how the Lisu express their understanding of nature through their use of musical instruments. The Lisu people possess a profound appreciation and understanding of nature, which is reflected in their performance practices. Investigating the links between the instruments, the natural world, and non-human beings will help illuminate how the Lisu people harmoniously

integrate their musical practices with their environment, fostering a meaningful and powerful bond.

4.2 Lisu Jew's Harps and Expressions of Love

In the previous chapter, I discussed the shy nature of the Lisu people and how they convey words or phrases they are too embarrassed or shy to say out loud through singing and metaphorical lyrics. Musical instruments also play a crucial role in this kind of expression. Before elaborating further on this point, it is necessary to provide some relevant information on the Lisu language. As mentioned in the Notes on Language at the start of this thesis, the Lisu language is a tonal language, featuring six distinct tones. This characteristic makes it possible for certain instruments to be used for the imitation of speech. In the array of instruments utilized by the Lisu people, the *chuchu* and *magu* stand out as the most representative at mimicking speech tones. As already mentioned, they are a type of jew's harp historically used by Lisu people in Yunnan province in China and northern Thailand. In fact, it is also a common instrument among many minority groups in southwestern China, referred to as *honghong* by the Yi people, *bixie* by the Bai, *bai* by the Dai, and so on (Long 2022: 415). The *chuchu* is typically made of bamboo, typically with three (but potentially four or five) pieces tied together at one end and fanned out at the other. A shallow groove is carved in the middle of each piece, and the bottom of which contains a "reed" of bamboo that vibrates when the instrument is played (Figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2 Lisu banboo Jew's harp – chuchu. Photo by Keyi Liu.

Li Sizhi, whom we met as a singer in Chapter 2, also possessed some *chuchu*-playing skills. Despite her belief that her performance was subpar and her reluctance to showcase it, upon witnessing my clumsy attempts to produce sound from the *chuchu,* she came over with a smile to give me a demonstration.

We warmed ourselves by the hearth as Li Sizhi played the *chuchu*. I saw she was gripping one end of the *chuchu* with her left hand, and held it against her slightly open mouth, with the reed positioned inside. Her index finger and middle finger of the right hand gently plucked the other end, causing the instrument to vibrate and produce sound. She manipulated the airflow from her breath and the movement of her mouth to create different pitches (Figure 4.3). At that moment, seated nearby, her grandson Hu Xuezhong commented, "Listen, the tune grandma is playing is speaking. She is talking about how much she misses her hometown and mother" (Hu Xuezhong, persona communication, Jishui Tang hamlet, Lari Village, 19 May 2021). She then shared her memories of playing the *chuchu* in her youth:

> I used to play the *chuchu* while dancing. It was usually played by women. But, as time passed, fewer and fewer women played it…. This sound is too soft; nowadays, everyone prefers using louder sounds…. We used to play the *chuchu* when I was younger to express our love to the boy who we like. At that time, I was too shy to speak to him directly so that I played it to express myself. (Li Sizhi, personal communication, Jishui Tang hamlet, Lari Village, 19 May 2021)



Figure 4.3 Li Sizhi is playing Lisu Jew's harp chuchu, Jishuitang village, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

In Lisu culture, there existed a gender-based division concerning the use of musical instruments. As Li Sizhi pointed out, the *chuchu* was predominantly played by women. Conversely, certain instruments, such as the *maniu*, have traditionally been reserved for men. It is important to note that many ethnic minorities in the southwest region exhibit similar gender narratives in relation to the use of *chuchu* and *maniu*. Mutual influence among these communities needs to be taken into account when considering these perspectives. The reason why women were not allowed to play was interesting. For instance, many of my consultants told me that women who played the *maniu* would grow beards. Nonetheless, this notion is now considered antiquated, and a number of female players who are good at playing *maniu* have emerged. One is Wang Shimei, a provincial-level intangible cultural heritage inheritor, who experienced musical growth as a former disciple of Ashicai, acquiring skills in both singing and playing the *maniu*.

> Life was tough in the past. I loved music, but I had to farm every day and didn't have the opportunity to study music or do what I enjoyed. I was fortunate to meet Ashicai, who taught me how to sing and play the *maniu*. At that time, girls were not allowed to play the *maniu*, but I didn't accept it. I wanted everyone to know that we could do it too. So, I followed Ashicai to learn and then we performed in various places. Although it was hard work, I was able to support myself and do what I loved at the same time. (Wang Shimei, personal interview, Lijiang city, 25 December 2020)

The same goes for the *chuchu*—nowadays, we can see men playing it too, such as Yang Shuai, the organizer of the Luquan Lisu Jew's Harp Inheritance Class. He said, "In the past, we had so many beautiful tunes for the *chuchu*, but now we can hardly hear them anymore, which is a pity. I want to preserve and pass on as much of this tradition as possible" (Yang Shuai, personal interview, Luquan county, 20 January 2021). As Li Sizhi previously mentioned, one of the reasons for the decreasing number of people playing the *chuchu* nowadays might be its relatively quiet sound. As a result, it is no longer as popular as it once was for accompanying dances (recall the description in D'Orléans [1901] 1989:196-7, cited in Chapter 5). Li's words also reflect another reason for the decline in the popularity of the mouth harp. In the past, playing the jew's harp was a common way to convey feelings and express love. However, as society has developed, modern lifestyles provide other opportunities or contexts for people to do this. Compared to social media and messaging apps, these traditional forms of expression have gradually become less popular and less practical.

Despite this, as of now, there remains a certain number of individuals proficient in playing the *chuchu*. However, the preservation of another type of jew's harp in Lisu, known as the *magu*, appears to be more endangered. The *magu*, played by vibrating the instrument using a hand-pulled twine (Figure 4.4), derives its hame from the Lisu language: "ma" means bamboo or wood, and "gu" refers to the action of pulling or plucking (Zhang Shunying, personal interview, Luquan county, 20 January 2021). In comparison to the *chuchu*, the *magu* is more challenging to play, resulting in fewer individuals mastering its technique.

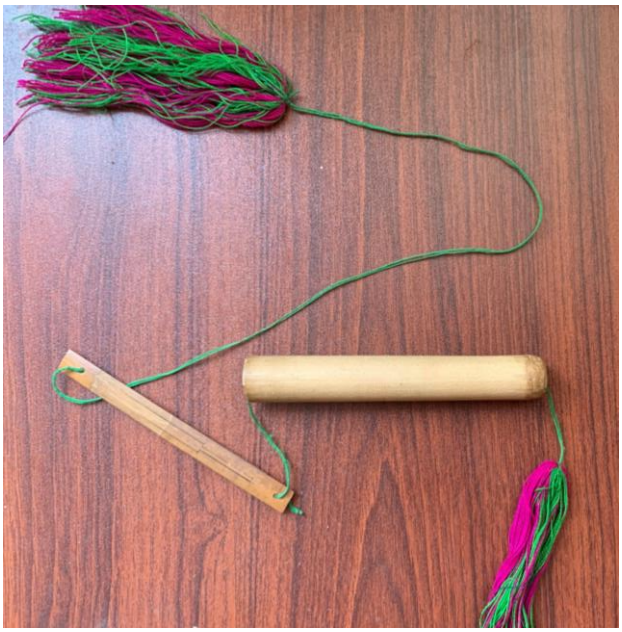


Figure 4.4 Magu. Photo by Keyi Liu, 2020.

For me, learning these two mouth harps, the *magu* and *chuchu*, indeed presented different levels of difficulty, as the locals had suggested. The *magu* proved to be more challenging than the *chuchu*, primarily due to its sound generation principle. To produce sound with the *magu*, one must pull a hemp string, causing it to vibrate, whereas the *chuchu* merely requires plucking. The force, frequency, and angle at which the hemp string is pulled all have an impact on the sound produced. Upon practicing the *magu* for a period, I still found myself only able to produce a few sounds by chance while continuously pulling the string. Upon mastering the basics of sound production, the next hurdle lies in the practice of proper mouth shape and pitch identification, as well as overall proficiency.

Throughout my fieldwork, I predominantly encountered elderly grandmothers who struggled at playing the instrument fluently, as well as with effectively communicating their experiences. Li Sizhi mentioned that her mother had the ability to play the instrument, but she herself did not possess the same skill. Consequently, through the acquaintance of Xiong

Yonglin, I was introduced to his distant cousin, Zhu Guiying, a resident of Yantou Village, Yongsheng in Lijiang. She was not only skilled at playing various ancient tunes on the *magu* and *chuchu*, but also capable of making the *magu*.[19] As seen in Figure 4.5, Zhu Guiying expertly held one end of the bamboo piece in her left hand, while positioning the line's opposite end over the fingers of her right hand. By pulling the twine at a specific frequency and angle, she induced vibrations in the bamboo, resulting in the production of sound. Then, in a manner akin to playing the *chuchu*, Zhu maintained her lips in close proximity to the bamboo piece and altered the shape of her mouth, exercising control over her exhalation to generate a variety of pitches.



Figure 4.5 Zhu Guiying playing magu, Yongsheng County, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

As I listened, the sound of the *magu* was quite soft, so I had to lean in as close as possible to her. At times, in order to hear the melody clearly, our faces were nearly touching. It suddenly dawned on me that the closeness between young men and women when playing the *magu* to express their love, combined with the instrument's delicate volume, created a beautifully intimate experience.

> Back when I was a young girl, if someone I liked gave me a *magu*, it would make me incredibly happy. At that time, a *magu* was somewhat like a token of affection. If a boy personally made one and gave it to a girl, it meant he was interested in pursuing her. If the girl agreed, she would accept the *magu*, and together, they would run up to the hills where she

[19] An Chinese language document on Lisu music in the mountain which includes the making process of *magu* is at https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1T64y1m7Kb/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click, accessed 22 April 2023.

> would convey sweet nothings to him by playing them on the mouth harp. (Zhu Guiying, personal interview, Yantou Village, Yongsheng County, 6 August 2021)

Hence, the *chuchu* and *magu* hold significant importance in women's leisure activities, communication, and expression of sentiment. This can be better understood by considering Morgan's research on the Jew's harp in Bali. Morgan explains that due to this instrument's engagement of same muscle groups and acoustical principles as used in verbal communication, it is often conceptualized as an extension of vocal sound (Morgan 2008: 14). Moreover, the Lisu language is a tonal language, comprising six tones: two uppers, two middles, and two lowers. This enables the *chuchu* and *magu* to more easily mimic these tonal contours and rhythmic articulations of a spoken phrase, allowing them to function as a "voice mask or modulator" (Morgan 2008: 29). Many groups worldwide use the jew's harp to generate covert information, encode, or conceal private messages (Impey 2018: 47), and formerly Lisu women were among them in using such a means to convey their most delicate and unspeakable sentiments. As Zhu Guiying added "When I am going through a tough time or feeling extremely sad, sometimes it is so hard to find someone to talk to. In those moments, I would play the *magu* facing the mountains. As I play, I feel that my wards are being listened to patiently, and this feeling sometimes brings tears to my eyes " (Zhu Guiying, personal interview, Yantou Village, Yongsheng County, 6 August 2021).

Zhu's mention of movement as part of sentimental expression can be likened to Feld's characterization of vocality as drawing body and motion into an interaction with the acoustical, affective, and sensory domains:

> Sound, hearing, and voice mark a special bodily nexus for sensation and emotion because of their coordination of brain, nervous system, head, ear, chest, muscles, respiration, and breathing. Moreover, hearing and voice are connected by auditory feedback and by physical resonance, the immediate experience of one's presence through the echo-chamber of the chest and head, the reverberant sensation of sound, principally one's own voice. By bringing a durative, motional world of time and space simultaneously to, from and back, top and bottom, and left and right, an alignment suffuses the entire fixed or moving body. This is why hearing and voicing link the felt sensations of sound and balance to those of physical and emotional presence (1996:97).

Returning to the technicalities of imitating speech tone with the *magu* or *chuchu*, and of how to find the tune of a melody, most of the individuals I consulted with, like Li Sizhi and Zhu Guiying, could not provide any further substantial explanation and instruction. For this reason, I specifically visited Luquan and met with Zhang Shunying, an intangible cultural heritage inheritor of Lisu jew's harp (both *chuchu* and *magu*) and the President of the Lisu

Ethnic Studies Association. In order to preserve and pass on this instrument and its melodies within the Lisu community, she established a heritage class. There, she teaches everything from crafting the instrument to playing it. Creating a well-crafted mouth harp requires attention to detail. Regarding playing the instrument, she has gained some insights through years of practice:

> To be honest, what is the most important is that you need to practice and experiment a lot. The melody comes together through the shape of your mouth, the force of your breath, and the positioning of your lips and tongue. There are countless notes you can explore on your own—there's no secret formula, and it's challenging to pinpoint exactly how to achieve them. But the key is to keep trying, and once you find the position on the *magu* to produce a note, you will remember the position and technique to play it. Each time you play that note, it will become easier to find. As you continue to practice, you will uncover more notes and learn to speak or play tunes with the *magu*. (Zhang Shunying, personal communication, 20 January 2021).

In this section, I tried to delve into the complex expressions and functions of the Lisu women's jew's harp. The exploration revealed its role as not only a symbol of affection exchanged between men and women but also as a unique means of communication that transcends verbal language. In fact, there are also numerous connections between the expressions of nature and jew's harp. In the following section, I will go deeper into this latter theme by examining another Lisu instrument that further demonstrates the interplay between nature, non-human beings, cultural expression, and Lisu music.

4.3 The Interplay of Nature and the Lisu Instrument

The depiction of nature and non-human entities has been a prevalent theme throughout the history of music. Musicians often draw inspiration from non-human entities in the nature worlds around them. By observing, experiencing, and understanding the sounds, habits, and characteristics of these entities, they capture their essence in their musical expressions. Lisu soundscapes are comprised of biophonic, geophonic, and anthrophonic elements, and these sounds in the environment are perceived and utilized by local residents (Guyette and Post 2015: 44). For the Lisu people, a healthy ecosystem indexes a daily soundscape including: the songs of specific birds, the calls of various insects; the sound of water in rivers; soundscapes and sounds related to monkeys, sheep, goats, yaks, and livestock; and other landscape sounds,

such as the rustling of plants, the wind, and echoes in the mountains. Lisu music-makers thus derive from their environment a wealth of experiential knowledge, which provides many clues that infuse their musical narration of the stories and experiences of the Lisu people.

In this section, I further explore the expression of Lisu music towards nature and non-human beings through reference to the largely homemade instrument *qiben*. While the research on the relationship between musical instruments and the environment is relatively limited, with some studies by Chris Gibson and Bradley Bennett focusing on the connection between guitar production, wood types, and the environment (Gibson 2019, Bennett 2016). However, these studies primarily concentrate on modern instruments, with fewer examples of indigenous instruments. In this section, I aim to delve further into the relationship between these elements by specifically examining the Lisu instruments as a case study. I also hope to highlight the role of Lisu instruments in the environment and daily lives of the community, in order to provide concrete links between music and the environment, the emotional connections between humans and non-human elements, and the ways in which individuals perceive and interact with their physical surroundings (Guy 2009: 219). Specifically, I will explore the following research questions: How does the *qiben* reflect Lisu understandings of life, nature, and non-human beings? What role does this instrument play in conveying their emotions towards the environment? How is nature integrated into this musical instruments and its music?

An apparently ancient saying in Weixi County goes "For music and dance, look to the south; for song and dance, look to the north." This means that the southern part of Weixi County is known for its music and dance, while the northern part is famous for song and dance. Although I stayed with Li Guiming's family in Jishui Tang hamlet, Lari Village, located in the southern part, it was apparent that merely staying there would not be sufficient to explore these questions, and so I collaborated with the Lisu Cultural Institute under the Ethnic and Religious Committee, who had applied to the Yunnan Provincial Cultural Bureau in April 2021 for support for the Yunnan Provincial Minority Culture Bi-Hundred Project—*Lisu Traditional Instrumental Ensemble Transmission Project*. The aim of the project was to investigate, record, and preserve *(*a traditional dance with instrumental ensemble, see further Chapter 4) in seven villages, namely Lahezhu Village, Roma Village, Labadi Village, Lari Village (Achi Madi hamlet), Touluo Village (Aga hamlet), Baijixun Township (Baijihang Lisu Research Association Organization), and Anyi Village. The funding from this project not only helped with transportation and living expenses but also allowed me to connect with

three Lisu colleagues who are also working on Lisu culture. Their assistance and hospitality proved invaluable both in the field and in my personal life. The following description of *qiben* is based on the investigation and interviews conducted with bands from these seven villages, as well as my observations and experiences in daily life.

4.3.1 The Lisu's Qiben and Birds

The Lisu people, it seems, are natural-born storytellers, and everything in the world has a story to tell. While I was interviewing in the seven villages, I heard several stories about the origins of the *qiben*. This appears to be one of the widely accepted versions in southern parts of Weixi County:

> Once upon a time, in a remote village nestled within the lush forests and mountains, there lived a young orphan man. He earned his living by collecting firewood. One day, while in the forest, he heard the mournful cries of the *guoduoluo*, *agunichi* and *awoluo* birds. Inspired by these sounds, he came up an idea to make an instrument called *qiben*. Consequently, the head of the *qiben* was designed to resemble the *guoduoluo*, the belly to mimic the *agumichi* and the tail mirrored the *awoluo*. The strings of the *qiben* represent not only the sound made by these birds but also the orphan's own voice. (Li Zizhong, personal interview, Laoyashu Village, 26 April 2021).

This story mentions that the basic shape of *qiben* was inspired by three different birds. I interviewed several villagers on the characteristics of these birds but found differing details in each locality. Nevertheless, those mentioned most often are a finch with a black body, red beak, and red claws [presumably, a black-crested finch]. The second one also belongs to the finch family, distinguished by its dark red body. The *agumichi* is a wild pigeon with a yellow body, black beak, and black claws. Indeed, after listening to the narrative, I found it was difficult to directly correlate the characteristics of *qiben* with the mentioned bird species. According to Li Zizhong, the creation of the *qiben* incorporates certain features from these birds, such as their pointed head, extended necks, rounded bellies, crisp sounds and overall temperament. This suggests that the design inspiration drawn from these birds more towards abstract elements, and emotions that resonate with their spirit, rather than merely reflecting their physical form.

Despite the limited literature on Lisu musical instruments, there are nonetheless some records which provide insight into the structure of the *qiben*. One example is a 30-minute

observational-style documentary by the filmmaker Yan Chun Su (2010). It not only tells the story of a Nujiang Lisu music master, Ah-Cheng, but also offers context on the musical culture surrounding *the qiben*, as well as knowledge on its shape and making process. Furthermore, researcher Wu Guodong has written that, "the neck measures around 15-25 cm in length and 3-4 cm in width and is without frets. It features a flat-topped headstock with two tuning pegs on the left and two on the right, along with four string shafts that were made of metal or nylon" (Wu 1994: 117). In reality, every *qiben* I have seen is unique in its appearance, with variations to body shape such as triangular, pear-shaped, rectangular, oval-shaped, waist-shaped, scoop-shaped, and others (Figure 4.6). The variation in *qiben* shapes can be explained in two ways. The first reason is the absence of mass production, resulting in each village producing these instruments by hand and being primarily self-sufficient. In nearly every one of the seven villages I visited, there were musicians capable of making this instrument. Li Zizhong, the *waqiqi* leader of Laoyashu village, explained, "We create the shape of the qiben according to our preferences, and all the *qiben* are made by hand, so no two *qiben* are identical" (Li Zizhong, personal communication, Laoyashu Village, 26 April 2021).



Figure 4.6 Qiben made by different people. Photo by Keyi Liu, 2020.

The second reason is to enrich the ensemble's timbre. To some extent, the size and shape of a *qiben* body determine its timbre and pitch. Li Hu, a *waqi* team leader of Anyi Village musician shared,

> The *qiben* we make from different types of wood produce different sounds [timbre]. Different shapes also yield varying sounds [timbre], some being lower [deeper] and others higher [brighter]. You see, even if the strings are tuned the same, the sound [timbre] will still differ. These contrasting sounds complement each other in an ensemble, and sounds more pleasant.

> Thus, when crafting instruments, we intentionally create *qiben* with distinct sounds, allowing us to emulate a wider variety of tones and nuances. (Li Hu, personal interview, Anyi Village, 10 June 2021).

Traditionally, strings are made of goat gut, but now these have been replaced by steel strings to increase the volume and its durability. The Lisu people who live in Myitkyina, Myanmar have demonstrated even more creativity and innovation in their efforts to increase the volume of the *qiben* (Figure 4.7). In Myitkyina, local Lisu people primarily use the *qiben* to accompany dance, and so enhancing resonance aims to ensure that more participants can hear the music. Firstly, the original neck and headstock were removed, and two new necks were installed, one on each side of the original position.

> The sound of the *qiben* is quite soft, so when there are many people, it's very difficult to hear the music for each participant. I designed this myself. When I play by myself or there are fewer people, I use the left side. When there are more people, I play the right side, which I've equipped with a pickup and amplifier to enhance the sound. (Soe Lwin, personal interview, Myskina,17 September 2019)



Figure 4.7 A qiben mande by local Lisu musician in Myitkyine, Mayanmar, 2019. Photo by Keyi Liu.

This interview palso rovided insight into the Lisu people's practice of using diverse types of wood to craft their musical instruments, resulting in each *qiben* possessing a distinct timbre. Soe and other interviewees alongside him emphasized that the varying shapes and wood types contribute to a range of sounds, from deep to bright. They explained that creating different *qiben* with unique sounds enhances the overall musical experience. While the Lisu

people may not employ scientific methodologies to examine the wooden materials used in their plucked string instruments, they draw on their own knowledge and lived experiences to comprehend the impact of distinct materials and instrument sizes on sound and feeling.

A Story of strings and tuning

In terms of the strings of the *qiben*, in the southwestern region of Weixi, in the Laoyashu, Lahezhu village, Yongchun Township, Weixi, there is a story that has been passed down through generations.

> Long ago, in the Biluo Mountains, there lived a farming couple who had no children. They lived a simple life, with the husband tilling the fields and the wife weaving cloth. Tragically, one day, the wife fell ill and passed away. The husband, devastated by grief, couldn't bear to bury his wife's body. Eventually, the husband realized that he couldn't continue living like this, so he decided to bury his wife in a spot within a golden bamboo forest where they often used to play. After saying his final goodbye, he was consumed by loneliness and sadness, and he spent day and night keeping vigil at his wife's grave.
>
> Three years and nine months passed, and one day, a flock of birds flew in from the horizon. These birds were called "da zi da jian" in the Lisu language, which are characterized by their black beaks and red eyes. They landed on this wife's grave, forming a circle around it and crying "da de li, da jian lai." The sight of these birds jumping and calling seemed to alleviate some of the husband's grief. Unconsciously, he picked up a hemp thread and placed it in his mouth. As he watched the birds, he began to pluck the thread, which produced a sound similar to the birds' cry "da de li, da jian lai." Struck by inspiration, the husband took a wooden plank and nailed four hemp threads of different thicknesses onto it. He plucked these threads, attempting to mimic the sound made by the birds. The instrument made by this husband is now the *qiben*. (Li Zizhong, personal interview, Laoyashu, Lahezhu Village, 10 June 2021)

In the story, the bird called "da zi da jian" is mentioned. The Lisu people named one of the tuning for the *qiben* according the sound this bird made, which is "da jian lai." This story about the *qiben* showed that the inspiration for tuning among the Lisu people also seems to come from birds. When I lived with them in the mountains, I found that the Lisu were keen observers and imitators of birds. Many times, the sky would be filled with crisp and pleasant birdsong. Before I'd had time to even find out where the birds were, they would mimic the birds' cries while enthusiastically introducing me to each bird, "Listen, that's the sound of a sparrow! That's the sound of a sisi bird!" The connection of the *qiben* to birds (and also insects—see below) in fact extends beyond both origin stories and their habitual attentiveness to details of the ornithological sound environment. To understand this, we need first discuss the strings of the instrument.

It is certain that the traditional Lisu *qiben* has a total of four strings, however the names of these four strings varies from village to village. For example, the four strings from the outer side to that closest to the player's body are called male string, second string, female string and auxiliary string in the Tuoluo village (Li Shuhua, personal interview, Aga group, Tuoluo Village, 10 June 2021); and the male string, son string, daughter string and mother string in the village of Roma (Li Yufang, personal interview, Luoma Village, 2 June 2021). According to this latter viewpoint Lisu think that the four strings represent a family, with the parents protecting their children, a nomenclature that reflects their basic familial concepts. Li Yufeng said, "Playing the *qiben* means that the entire family is happy, and there is no way to play without all four strings." As the name of strings are varies from village to village, they are collectively called first, second, third and fourth string from outside to inside in the rest of this chapter.

Indeed, the techniques of playing *qiben* are not complex. The basic technique involves plucking and strumming the strings with the fingers. The thumb is only used to play the auxiliary strings which is the fourth string. The index finger is used for multiple purposes and can pluck the first, second, and third string. The middle finger, ring finger and little fingers are not normally used (Lisuzu Jianshi Bianxiezu 2008: 210). The left hand is used to press the strings with the index and middle fingers (occasionally with the ring finger and little finger). Furthermore, the left hand quickly covers the four strings to stop the resonating string to prevent prior sounds from carrying over and causing a mix-up and indicating the end of the unit as well.

The crux of mastering the performance of the *qiben* lies in tuning. The tuning is extremely diverse, often requiring musicians to modify the interesting the relationship between the strings in accordance with the tune's content, structure, or playing technique. Each of these adjustments corresponds to specific tuning names and string reading methodologies, adding layers of intricacy to the task. It is perhaps due to these complex tuning methods, that the *qiben* is considered to be the most difficult of the three major Lisu instruments to learn, despite the relative simplicity of its playing techniques. To shed light on this complex aspect, the subsequent section will provide an in-depth exploration of *qiben* tuning practices, informed by the extensive knowledge among musicians in the Aga hamlet of Tuoluo Village.

4.3.2 Knowledge and Practice of **Qiben** *Tuning with Bird's Calls*

On the morning of 10 June 2021, I embarked on a journey to Aga hamlet, Tuoluo Village, Weideng Township with Li Guiming and Ahai, who are colleagues of Li Guiming and come from Jishui Tang hamlet. Thanks to Li Guiming's assistance, the villagers in Aga had recently established a *waqi* ensemble heritage site, allowing them to showcase their rich musical culture more broadly and receive a modest subsidy to support their artistic pursuits. The sun had just risen, and at 7 am, our excitement was palpable as we began our drive to visit the members of the members of *waqi* ensemble team. But fate had other plans. The mountain roads were narrow and unforgiving. We found ourselves stuck for almost an hour when a large truck blocked our path. In these situations, one vehicle would have to reverse until there was just enough space for both to pass, but with a truck, the challenge was even more daunting.

Upon arriving at ensemble member Li Shuhua's home, we found that almost all the ensemble members and some of their family members had gathered there. They all came to the entrance to welcome us as soon as we arrived. In fact, we had already felt the warmth and hospitality of the Aga hamlet *waqi* members before we even arrived. Around 10 am, while we were still stuck on the mountain road, Li Shuhua called us multiple times to check on our location, asking if we had taken the wrong route and if we had eaten. He informed us that they had slaughtered a pig at home, and they were eagerly waiting for us to join them for a meal. While the Lisu people are renowned for their graciousness towards guests, their warmth on this occasion was exceptional.

During the meal, I once again heard the story about the *qiben* that I had previously encountered at Laoyashu hamlet. Li Shuhua explaining that "da zi da jian" refers to a species of black drongo, a bird with a beautiful call. He mentioned that one of the *qiben*'s tuning methods "da jian lai" was based on the bird's song. After the meal, he demonstrated the "da jian lai" tuning on the *qiben* (Figure 4.8). Before my eyes, he quickly plucked each of the four strings, saying, "Listen, this is the sound of 'da jian lai'." Wanting to accurately record the sound of each string, I asked him if he could slow down, playing each string individually for me. Though he seemed not to fully grasp my intent, he accommodated my request anyway. With each string he plucked, he would explain, "This is what this string sounds like." As numerous Lisu musicians have pointed out, even though there might not be a

specific way to read or denote the pitches in Lisu music, we can still communicate effectively about music details.



Figure 4.8 Li Shuhua demonstrating the tuning of "da jian lai" on qiben, Weixi County, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

To provide a clearer illustration, I sketched a rough model of the *qiben* and marked the tuning notes on it (Figure 4.9). As showed in the figure, the tuning for "da jian lai" is A4-C5-A4-D5 from left to right in sequence. It is important to note that this tuning does not adhere to the concept of standard pitches in the Western music system; rather, it represents a set of intervallic relationships. For ease of analysis, particularly in discussing the ensemble context later in this text, I have chosen to notate the tuning in this manner to provide a clearer understanding of the subject matter.

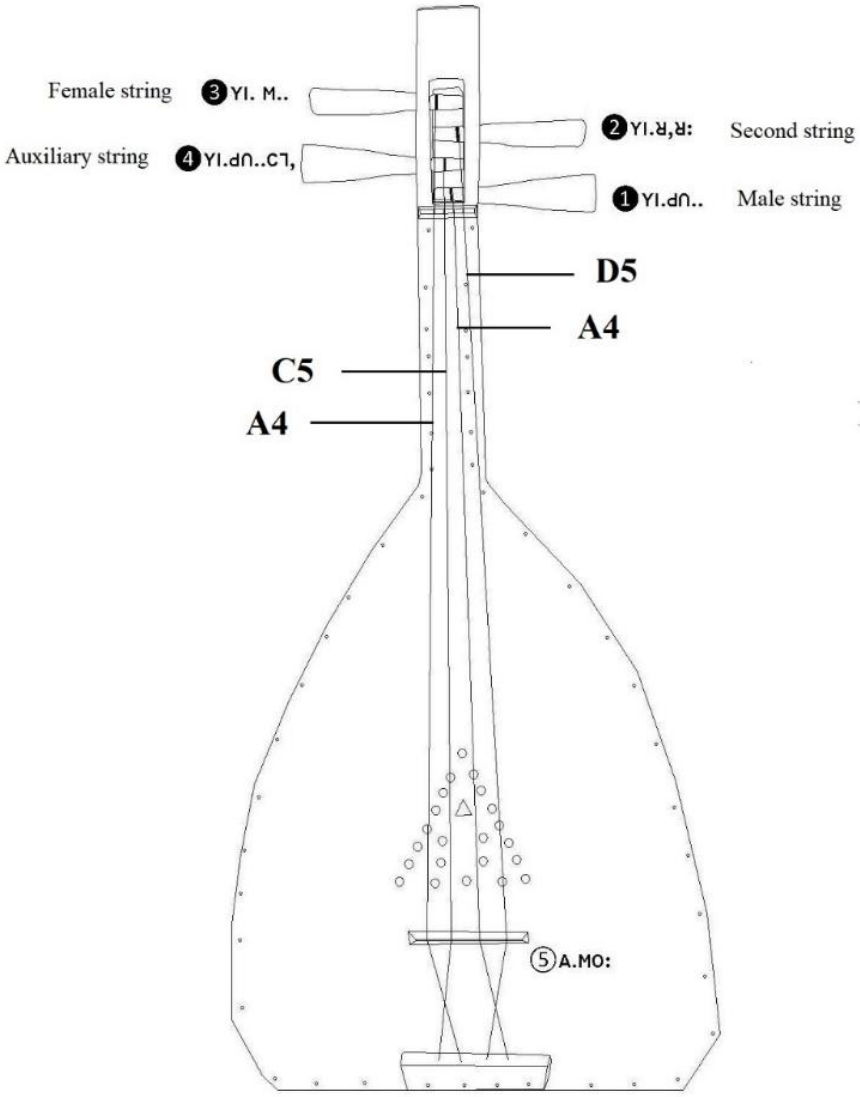


Figure 4.9 Qiben tuning "da jian lai" in Aga halmet, Tuole Village, Weideng Township, Weixi, 2021. Drawn by Keyi Liu.

In addition to "da jian lai," there are several other tunings for the qiben. Each tuning has its own specific name, and it is worth noting the connections to nature within their nomenclature, such as "dundun," "shima," "chuoma nuoma," and "biedu." After inquiring about each one, I documented their tuning names, the sounds they imitate, and the tuning notes as follows (see Figure 4.10):

Tuning name(Lisu)	Tuning name (pinyin)	Imitation of sound source	Tuning
ƆO:-M-NO.-M	chuoma nuoma	Sparrow	A4 C5 E5 A6
T:-JY-LA	da jie lai	Black drongo	A4 C5 A4 D5
XՈ-M	sha ma	Fly	A4 C5 E5 A6
TƎ,-TƎ,	dun dun	Cicada	A4 A4 C5 D5
BYE:-TU.,	bie du	Yunnan Vespids	A4 C5 A4 E5
CI:-ZƆ.	ji zeng	Pipits	A4 D5 C5 D5

Figure 4.10 The qiben setting string situation of Aga hamlet in Tuoluo Village, Weideng Township, Weixi County

As you can see from the chart, the timings used in Tuoluo Village are inspired by the imitation of different bird and insect calls and are named after the characteristics associated with them. Unfortunately, detailed information regarding the sound source of the "chuma nuoma" tuning method was not obtained. It is possibly a type of bird with a black beak and a red head. According to another ensemble member:

> Its call is very distinctive. I used to see it quite often when I was a child, but it seems to have disappeared now. So, it's difficult for me to describe it to you. I also remember there used to be a particularly large bird here that would swoop down and fly very very fast, but I have no idea why that bird is gone now. It seems that many animals are getting harder to see. It is such a shame! (A member of *waqi* ensemble team, Aga hamlet, Tuoluo Village, 10 June 2021)

Why do Lisu people always imitate the sounds of animals. Levin provides a potential explanation from in his research on Tuva's indigenous people. They believed that imitation is a continuation of something, and when one listens to the beautiful sounds of birds, talented individuals naturally try to imitate them. By imitating something found in nature, a person can remember it and place themselves within that environment (Levin 2010: 29).

In nearly every village I visited, there were four to six different tunings of *qiben*, and the tunings mastered by players in each of the seven villages were not uniform. This range of tunings seems ideal for playing a variety of musical styles, speeds and contents. In terms of tunings, Zhang Xingrong[20](2006:107) and Wu Guodong (Figure 4.11, 1994:117) recorded

[20] The qiben tuning method is: 1. c1 be1 g1 c2 (la do mi la); 2. #c1 e1 #f1 #g1 (la do re mi); 3. a d1 e1 a1 (la re mi la); 4. a e1 a1 e2 (la mi la mi); 5. c1 d1 e1 a1 (do re mi la).

five and eight methods of tuning the strings respectively. However, their documentation only covered the pitches, without delving into further explanations. The specific usage of these various tunings remains unexplored. It is possible that their examination took place too long ago, or that the villages investigated by Zhang and Wu differed from mine, resulting in discrepancies in the tunings we learned.

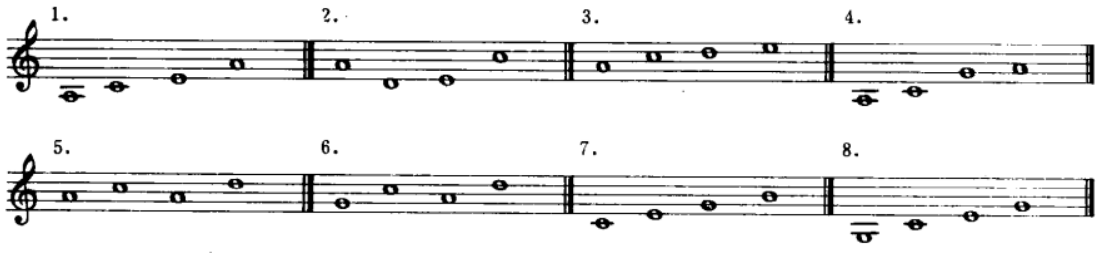


Figure 4.11 The eight types of qiben tuning strings recorded by Wu Guodong

To further investigate, I documented the tuning of *qiben* in each village and summarized the most frequently mentioned tunings in the table below (Figure 4.12):

Name of villages	Tuning Names				
	dundun	dajianlai	chumanuoma	guaza	dijie
Achi madi	A4-C5-A4-D5		A4-D5-E5-C5	A4-D5-E5-A5	A4-C5-E5-A5
Anyi	A4-D5-E5-A5	A4-A4-C5-D5	A4-C5-D5-C5	A4-C5-D5-A5	
Baijixun		A4-E5-A4-D5	A4-D5-E5-C5		A4-C5-E5-A5
Labadi		A4-A4-C5-D5	A4-C5-D4-C5	A4-D5-E5-A5	A4-C5-A4-D5
Luoma	A4-D5-E5-A5	A4-A4-C5-D5	A4-D5-E5-D5	A4-D5-E5-A5	
Tuoluo	A4-C5-E5-A5	A4-C5-A4-D5	A4-C5-D5-C5		
Lahezhu	A4-C5-D5-A5	A4-A4-C5-D5	A4-D5-E5-D5		A4-C5-E5-A5

Figure 4.12 Tunings for qiben in seven villages in southern Weixi

From the table, we can see that the practice of tunings with the same name is not consistent across different villages. For instance, “da jie lai” can be A4-A4-C5-D5 in Anyi Village, Labadi Village, Luoma Village and Lahezhu Village, but in Tuoluo village, it is referred to as A4-C5-A4-D5. And A4-C5-A4-D5 appears in Achi madi Village as “dundun” and in Labadi Village as “dijie.” I asked my consultants how they interpreted these discrepancies.

LI SHUHUA: Our tuning is different from other places. We set the strings according to our local style. If we use the tuning method from another village, we won't be able to play our own tunes.

KEYI: I noticed that this kind of tuning is called "dijie" in Labadi Village. Does your village have "dijie" tuning?

LI SHUHUA: We don't have that here. There are so many tunings, and many of them are created by other places. Our village has passed down these few tunings from generation to generation. Look, you actually don't need that many tunings. If I change my playing technique slightly, I can still play different tunes without setting another tuning.

Another *qiben* player in the team: He can do it. Sometimes he doesn't even need to change the tuning; he can play many tunes with one tuning. But we can't do it without setting the particular tuning. I need a specific tuning for each tune.

(Li Shuhua and a *qiben* player, group interview, Aga hamlet, Tuoluo Village, 10 June 2021)

4.3.3 Qiben in the Instrument Ensemble of Waqi

Qiben is performed in various ways: as an accompaniment for singing, as a solo instrument, in ensemble performances, and to accompany dance. Typically, when accompanying singing, it is used for more formal and serious long narrative songs, such as the Lisu creation stories，Ritual Scriptures (Zhang 2006) and Wedding and Funeral Scriptures. Ensemble performances are more casual, involving two or more players without any limitation on the number of participants. Usually, two players are most commonly seen, playing various tunes together. Accompanying *waqi* dance seems to be the musicians' favourite performance activity and is somewhat more complex in practice. In this section, I explore what is the practice knowledge of *qiben* in *waqi* ensemble performances in detail.

Let's return to Tuoluo Village, where after a satisfying meal and leisurely conversation, everyone prepared to head to the activity square to dance and help digest their food. Before that, there was an important task to be done. The members of *waqi* ensemble all gathered together to tune their instruments. They consisted of one flute player, two *jizi* players, and four *qiben* players. A difference in present-day performances is that there is no longer a limit on the number of players, and everyone who wishes to participate may join in. The size of *waqi* ensembles for each performance are not fixed and casual. Members have their own personal and work, and their availability for performances depends largely on their individual willingness and scheduling.

Throughout the tuning process, the seven-hole flute player kept giving a reference pitch. If the flute player is not present, the *qizi* or *qiben* player can also provide a reference pitch (Li Shuhua, personal interview, Aga hamlet, Tuoluo Village, 10 June 2021). In this context, the focus of their tuning process is not to align the instruments with a standardized pitch system, such as those commonly found in Western music. Instead, their primary goal is to establish a harmonious and appropriate relationship between the intervals played by each instrument. As they use different reference pitches, the standard pitch is different between bands in various villages. I have therefore had to record the interval relationships of the four strings of the *qiben* based on the different standard pitch separately. Therefore, in Figure 4.10, when I sorted out the different tunings for each village, the focus was on the relationships between the musical intervals, rather than on specific pitches. To make it easier to understand and visually clear, the root note was set as A for all the tunings.

After they finished tuning their instruments, I was surprised to find that the four *qiben* players used four different tunings "chuma nuoma", "da jian lai", shima," and "dundun" in their ensemble performance in the same times. Regarding this, Li Shuhua explained:

> If all the tunings were the same, it would be monotonous. Our different tunings make our sound more pleasant and rich. Don't you Han people have something like this too? … Our tunings have been passed down like this since ancient times. In everyday life, when you are in the mountains, you hear the calls of different animals and insects, right? It's not possible that you only hear the call of one bird species, is it? We naturally mix these different tunings together, and it is pleasant to listen to. Otherwise, it always feels like something is wrong (Li Shuhua, personal interview, Aga hamlet, Tuoluo Village, 10 June 2021).

Li then likened the principle of variously tuned *qiben* to the arrangement of a Chinese traditional orchestra. In a Chinese traditional orchestra there are, for example, several contrasting forms of *ruan*, a round-bodied lute with four strings, played with a plectrum, such as the soprano 高音阮 (gaoyin ruan), alto 中音阮 (zhongyin ruan), and bass 低音阮 (diyin ruan). In each case, their tuning varies depending on the size of the *ruan* and the specific music being performed but the overall aim is to ensure the ensemble presents a balanced, diverse, and rich sound.

4.3.4 Instrumental Music Analysis

The Lisu musical instruments largely serve to accompany dance performances. A distinguishing feature of all Lisu dance tunes is their repetitive nature, with only minor

adjustments made that do not affect the overall melody or formal structure of the pieces (Larsen 1984:50). This is because Lisu dance tunes lack a definitive stopping point; instead, the end of each piece is determined by the needs of the dancers. Musicians continue to play repetitively until the dancers need rest or wish to change to a different dance step and tune. Generally, dance tunes in the southern Weixi region are not performed individually but in sets. For instance, a set of *waqi* dances consists of 8-12 distinct sections. Each section of the dance corresponds to a specific melody. The dance steps between sections are interconnected and develop from a single unit of footwork. Similarly, the music also evolves, with each section featuring music that adapts to the changing dance steps.

With regards to the musical component of the dance, I attempted to transcribe the melody of the twelve sections. It is worth mentioning that these musical scores only provide a reference point for rhythm, beat, tempo, and overall metrical framework. In actual performances, the melodies develop differently each time even while there is a sense that many familiar musical phrases are present in each rendition. What is stable is the rhythm and metrical framework of each section. As for the melody, it is more of an improvisation within the rhythm and framework in question. Concepts of improvisation differ across various cultures, for example, in traditional Western classical music, improvisation can include certain pre-fixed compositional elements, such as the continuo bass. However, improvisation in Lisu culture is less systematic than this. According to my observations, the transmission of this music is primarily accomplished through the active learning of performance skills by each learner after they have mastered the basic framework and segments of melody. This learning is achieved through auditory and memory-based musical abilities and eventually integrated into the learner's performance to form new versions and styles. Musicians actively learn different performance techniques and styles over time, gradually forming their own fixed and well-performing versions of the music. Each musician's performance version may then become an object of learning for others, and through re-combination, new versions are generated. The techniques and styles of different performers and schools of thought together form the musical performance characteristics and style of the entire genre. As Larsen mentioned：

> The melodic building blocks of Lisu instrumental music are a number of small melodic figures. These are specific to each instrument and constitute the stylistic uniformity within each of the instrumental repertoires. The figures are linked together in a variety of different combinations similar to the way the various sequences of dance steps are combined (1984:51).

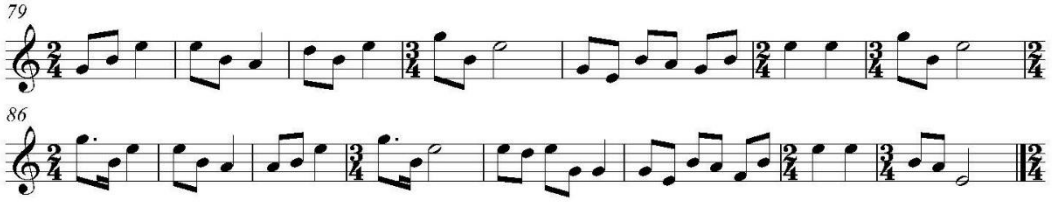
In order to provide an illustration, I have extracted representative examples of melodic material from the *waqi* ensemble performances as performed in Pantiange Village (Figure 4.13). In the score, I only documented the flute part because it is more audible and recognizable compared to other instruments. It is important to note that the rhythmic groupings and metrical division are based on dance steps. This was done for the purpose of making a transcription; an abstracted concept of metre is not utilized in the Lisu cultural context.



8.



9.



10.



11.



12.

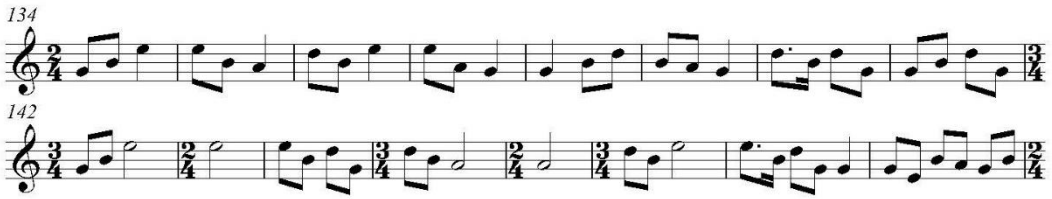




Figure 4.13 Transcription of basic melodic units from the waqi dance ensemble, Pantiange Village.[21]Transcribed by Keyi Liu, 2022.

As shown in Figure 4.11, the musical material of the first melodic unit develops and changes as the music progresses to new sections, which have their own patterns of foot movement, resulting in an increasing number of beats and a faster rhythm. It seems that the musicians have already become well-versed in the general melodic direction and musical segments, and they improvise by reorganizing these materials in various ways. As Shelemay says, the contents of individuals' memory palace are occasionally rearranged, re-establishing new relationships with each other and with the structure they inhabit (2006: 20). Another characteristic is that the beats are not regular. When I attempted the transcription, I utilized a combination of mixed meters and additive meters are employed, integrating duple and triple beats resulting in the building of melodies by joining smaller musical components together. This process results in an "open melodic structure" (Larsen 1984: 51), which means that the melodies do not adhere to a fixed, repeating pattern. Instead, they have a more fluid and flexible structure, allowing for a greater variety in the way they unfold. The underlying reasons for these complex rhythms and the Lisu people's interpretation of them will be further discussed in depth in Chapter 5.3.2.

[21] The 1-10 in the transcription indicate the start of a new melodic unit in each case.

This became the biggest challenge for me, whether I was learning to play the instruments or mastering the dance steps. As a classically trained pianist, I have heavily relied on sheet music and structured, rule-based musical elements and when confronted with irregular and freely recombined musical elements within a framework, I found myself somewhat at a loss. Throughout the process of learning music from the Lisu people, I discovered that some aspects of my previous musical training became obstacles in understanding and mastering Lisu music. Instead, I was repeatedly told that I needed to immerse myself in the environment and context and learn through experience. For example, observing the movements and calls of animals and attempting to imitate them would help me understand the natural laws within the mountains. Through this approach, I was inspired and realized that people do not necessarily need to put everything they learn into writing. It will reside in your mind, permeate your actions, and integrate into your body.

4.4 Conclusion

In this exploration of Lisu instruments, the focus narrows to the jew's harp and the *qiben*, illuminating the relationships between music, expression of sentiment, and the natural world within Lisu society. The jew's harp is more than just a musical instrument, being also a symbol of affection and a complex system of communication that can convey emotions, narratives, and cultural values in ways that transcend verbal language. Regrettably, at this stage, I have not fully mastered the Lisu language. This subject leaves some questions worth further exploration. For example, in some minority groups in southwestern China, and even on a broader global scale, there are instances of women expressing themselves through the Jew's harp. How do they use this to articulate or imitate language, both tonal and non-tonal? How does this inform our understanding of the relationship between music and language? Understanding these would deepen our comprehension of the intricate relationship between musical expression and linguistic communication.

My study of the *qiben* uncovers the profound bond Lisu people envisage between themselves and their environment and its non-human inhabitants. By using different instruments, themes, and techniques, they successfully evoke the spirit of their subjects, providing a rich and immersive musical experience. Their inspiration is derived from observations, learning and insights into natural landscapes, plants, animals and daily life. In the absence of a system of

writing, the senses of the Lisu people seem to be amplified. They can hear certain animals, plants and insects that others, like me, cannot. Their imitations of nature and non-human beings extend beyond the concrete, revealing an understanding and perception unique to Lisu people, which others may not fully comprehend. Their understanding is built on experimentation, and they strive to understand and make understandable to their fellow humans the ways of being of other species, places and materials. Consequently, it becomes paramount to consider the relationships between music, culture and nature from various perspectives, promoting self-reflection and flexibility to avoid ethnocentrism and acknowledging that diverse viewpoints can coexist and contribute to a deeper understanding of these relationships (Seeger 2016: 95-96).

This exploration, particularly the portrayal of *qiben* music, serves as a steppingstone to the next chapter. It introduces the interconnectedness of musical and physical expressions within Lisu culture. As previously noted, the fusion of instrumental music and dance is a distinctive feature, signifying a integrative nature in their performance arts. In the forthcoming chapter, the relationship between dance and music will be unravelled further, emphasizing the influence of dance steps on musical composition. This will include an in-depth analysis of the rhythm of the previously mentioned footsteps and their role in shaping the overall musical landscape.

Chapter 5 The Lisu Dance: Dance Steps, Instruments, and Song as a Complementary Whole

"We can sing when we can talk, and we can dance when we can walk."

-- Lisu proverb

5.1 Introduction

As a researcher who has worked closely with the Lisu people, I have come to appreciate the complexity and richness of their cultural traditions, including their unique dance forms. The Lisu are a nomadic group who have migrated across vast regions; as such, they are a dispersed people with diverse cultural expressions. In my research, I have used the term "Lisu dance" as a broad category to encompass the various regional dance forms practiced by the Lisu people, rather than "Lisu traditional dance" or "Lisu indigenous dance". I have done this for two reasons: firstly, to avoid limiting Lisu dance to a specific period or region and to acknowledge its historical and cultural changes and diversity; secondly, to respect the naming conventions of the Lisu people and to view dance as a way of life rather than just a folkloric display. In my work, I have found the lack of standardised naming conventions for Lisu dances to pose a challenge, as different regions have different names for contrasting or even for similar dance forms. However, identifying, classifying, and defining these dances, or constructing a taxonomy of dance names is not my intention. Hence, my approach simply pays respect to local customs and dialects when naming Lisu dances. It is also important to acknowledge that these names may not represent the categorization of these dances in a broader context, nor do they necessarily reflect how these dances are referred to in other regions.

In this chapter, I continue to explore the manifestations of nature in dance, but beyond this underpinning topic, I also discuss the diversity and social aspects of Lisu music and dance. In the first section, I examine the characteristics and the making processes of three Lisu dances, *waqi*, *achi mugua* and *gaqie*, found respectively in southern Weixi city in the Lancang River basin, in the northern part of Weixi city, and in Lijiang Prefecture in the Jinsha River basin (Figure 5.1). *Waqi*, *achi mugua* and *gaqie* dances are all transliterations from Lisu language

into Chinese pinyin (the Chinese terms used are respectively 瓦器, 阿尺木瓜 and 嘎且). My material is based on oral individual recollections and collective memories shared by Lisu research consultants during my fieldwork in 2019-2021, as well as on earlier materials found in archives and literature.

In the second section, I draw on my fieldwork materials to make observations on cultural fusions and collisions, the identity of different participants, the social functions of dance to compare and analyse three dances. I am well aware of the inherent difficulties and challenges in conducting a comparative study of dance between three different Lisu communities living in different regions. Cultural evolution is a natural occurrence due to long-term migration, and as such, similarities and differences are inevitable. To address this concern, I did not overly emphasize or extensively describe the similarities and differences in dance between these three communities. My aim is to illustrate distinctive characteristics, explain the reasons for their formation, and to map the elements of diversity in Lisu culture, analysing the underlying causes of this variety, and exploring the ways in which individuals express their experiences and engage with their natural and social environments through the medium of dance. Finally, I discuss how Lisu identify their own community's dances from those of other Lisu communities, and even from dances of different ethnic groups. in such a multi-ethnic cultural environment, in the context of contemporary Chinese politics, and under the dominance of Han culture. I think this case may help us to understand the cultural encounters and opportunities facing minority or marginal groups in contemporary China.

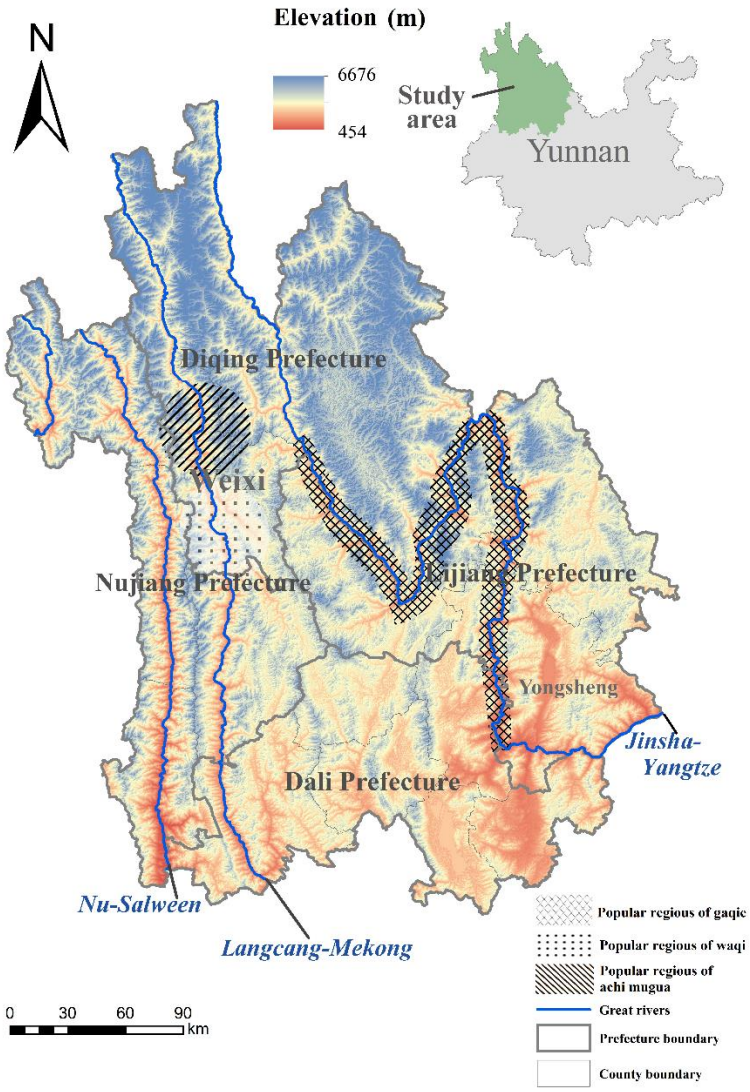


Figure 5.1 Regious of Popularity of waqi, achi mugua and gaqie dance. 2022. Base map from courtesy of Bai Si. Map redrawn by Keyi Liu.

5.2 In Harmony with Music and the Movement of Dances: Exploring the Interplay of Sound and Movement

Waqi, *achi mugua* and *gaqie* are the favourite folk dances among the local Lisu people in each of the three areas already mentioned. They can be considered equivalent in the sense that each community presents their own type of dance as typical and representative of Lisu traditional dance, but the name, movement and music differs in each area. These dances not only document and enact the history and culture of the Lisu people, but also depict the Lisu way of life through the symbiosis of the comprehensive dimensions of creative arts, namely,

music, language, and movement. In these dances, music is efficiently utilized to initiate and socialize members in groups (such as age-grade groups), encourage marriages, and maintain moral standards and respect in the society. Particular occasions of rituals, life, and yearly cycles are celebrated with music and dance.

Literature on Lisu dance was scarce before the 20th century and the rise of written records, but, more recently this ethnic group has gradually gained the attention of scholars. Publications in Chinese and English include some preliminary studies of Lisu music, dance and Christian music (Durrenberger 1975, Larsen 1984, Arrington 2014, and Diao 2015). Since the Lisu dance *achi mugua* was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006, some specialized literature about *achi mugua* has also arisen, including several MA theses (Wang 2020 and Yang 2015). The depth of research has significantly increased, but the scope is quite narrow; writings are mainly focused on politics of intangible cultural heritage and cultural inheritance. Unfortunately, there has not yet been a monograph on Lisu dance so far.

In situating my own study of Lisu against the wider literature, I found that when I conducted my own interviews the actual situation didn't always correspond with what I had found in earlier sources. This could be explained by the rapid evolution of Weixi and Lijiang in recent decades. Additionally, since Weixi is an area where a diverse range of ethnic groups and civilizations have coexisted, the information I collected and collated differed village by village. Because of these discrepancies, I will re-examine and reassess the creation, form, aesthetics, and diversity of Lisu dance and relate my observations to the complexities and challenges of the actual situation in the field.

5.2.1 Waqi

I start with *waqi* in south Weixi (see Figure 5.1 above), the only Lisu Autonomous County in China.[22] It is situated in the northwest of Yunnan and bordered by Tibet to the north, Dali to the south, the Jinsha river to the east and the Nujiang river to the west. Although there are twenty-seven minorities here, the majority of the population is Lisu.[23] Weixi is not only a concentration of Lisu people, but also a hotbed of cultural activity, and came highly

[22] The designation Autonomous County means this area has a degree of administrative autonomy.
[23] According to the 2019 Weixi County Statistical Report, there are twenty-seven ethnic minorities represented in the 157,279 total population, including Lisu, Tibetan, Naxi, Yi, and Miao with Lisu accounting for 57.46% and Tibetans accounting for 8.19%.

recommended to me by Lisu consultants from outside the Weixi region who work in Lisu culture-related fields. In their view, Weixi is where Lisu traditional culture is the best preserved and the richest.

What makes Weixi so special? Let us first consider its geographical location. As the map in Figure 5.1 shows, Weixi is in the middle of three rivers in the Lancang River basin. It is worth pointing out that these three rivers that lie parallel to each other on the map are in fact sandwiched between large mountains. They are very narrow, and their riverbeds are not navigable due to rockfalls and gravel deposits that have turned them into rapids. Therefore, people who live this area cannot visit each other easily in an east-west direction. Besides, the elevation of the mountains to the north is up to six kilometres. The most convenient route to get to here is to enter either from Lijiang or Dali. The relatively isolated living environment and poor transport network may be two reasons why traditional Lisu culture is better preserved here.

Waqi is popular in this area. The term literally translates as foot-tapping dance. It is kind of self-entertainment folk dance accompanied by an instrumental ensemble. In some villages, vocals are included as part of the instrumental accompaniment, as in the case of Pantiange village. When this occurs, we find a combination of all the elements of Lisu traditional performance culture: dance, instrumental music and vocal music.

4.2.1.1 Autoethnography on Participating in Waqi

The first time I participated in a spontaneous *waqi* dance was at a celebration of the Han Chinese Dragon Boat Festival (the Lisu referred to as *maha manani*), held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. In fact, the Lisu do not celebrate this Han Festival, but it is a three-day national holiday, so the normally quiet village suddenly came alive with young people who usually work in the city and children who go to school returning from their holidays. As soon as I opened my eyes in the morning, I heard the courtyard of Li Guiming's house bustling with activity. Li Sixian's three daughters as well as her grandchildren had all returned from Kunming, Lijiang and Shangri-La. This was the first time I had seen the younger generation of this family. "Liu, we'll have breakfast later and go to the grassland to have fun," Gu Hongyan, Li Guiming's wife, said to me with a smile.

Li Guiming assembled all his relatives and they drove four vehicles to a grass dam in Labadi village to celebrate the festival. When we arrived, there were already several groups of people playing on the grass: from a distance the different groups of people dancing in circles in their Lisu costumes resembled flowers blooming on the lawn. As we approached, we heard the sounds of music, singing and laughter all around; it was as if the setting was a large music festival combined with a picnic. Some of the groups contained teenagers carrying portable stereo speakers and playing popular Lisu dance music. Their music comprised catchy versions of traditional Lisu songs, mostly in 4/4 metre, with simple dance steps. Meanwhile, middle-aged and older people had joined forces to form more traditional *waqi* teams, where the music had complicated rhythmic changes that required more challenging footwork.

One of the *waqi* groups included dancers from Laoyashu village whom I had interviewed previously. They had arranged themselves into a loose circle, facing into the centre, playing their instruments and dancing at the same time. Their feet performed a variety of actions, including steps that I analyse as: open, parallel, stomp, kick, raise, hook, and bow and arrow strides. Some people had already gathered around the group, forming a kind of outer circle, and were joining in the dance (Figure 5.2). The group's leader Li Zizhong told me that "theirs [the young people's dance] is too simple, and not enough fun for dancing. Nowadays, fewer and fewer young people can dance a traditional *waqi* like we can. For us [older people], it's more fun to dance like this."[24] Then, he happily invited me to join the dance team: this was just one of many occasions when I found that Lisu people enjoy inviting visitors to dance with them. Rather than just observe, they felt I should be sharing the fun too! At moments when I mixed up the steps, someone would give a kind laugh and patiently show me the dance moves until I got back into step. In fact, they seemed to quite enjoy when I got the wrong steps: "We are not laughing at you. It's just your wrong steps are so cute!" said one old lady on another occasion. Anyone who wanted to join in the simple or complex dances, whether Lisu or from another ethnic group, was welcomed and encouraged to participate. Social barriers are dismantled through such participation, and villagers' networks expanded.

[24] I will use "leader", "dance team member", "player" and "participant" to cover the individuals under discussion. Lisu has no terms to describe musicians, dancers or performers. As I will demonstrate, Li Zizhong in particular would object to being called "musicians" or "performer", even though from a Western musical perspective he might be called a folk musician.



Figure 5.2 Waqi dance in Laoyashu village, Weixi, Dragon Boat Festival, 14 June 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

4.2.1.2 *Waqi* Dance Structure

A complete set of *waqi* usually has twelve sections, known to the Lisu as the "twelve feet". Each section has a stable metrical and melodic framework and corresponding dance movement (see further Chapter 3). In terms of music, all melodies are repeated with minor changes that do not impact the overall melody or formal structure of the melodies. The melody of each section is linked together in a variety of sequences of dance steps. From the first to the twelfth section, the rhythm gets faster and faster, the beat gets more complex,[25] and the dance steps become successively more complicated (Figure 5.3). When I learned to dance *waqi*, I was able to learn the first five sections by dancing two or three times, imitating my teachers. But from the sixth section, the rhythm became more irregular again, and the footwork was quite difficult to take in or reproduce. During my fieldwork, I found many villagers who no longer knew how to dance the final few difficult sections.

[25] The first six sections have a relatively regular rhythm which can adequately by transcribed in 4/4 time. The remaining sections are difficult to transcribe and can only be divided according to the foot movements and the accents given by the feet striking the ground. For example: section 7 (4/4+5/4); section 8 (4/4+5/4, 3/4+4/4+3/4).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Name in Lisu	Yi du du	Yi zhen gua	A nai gua sa tuo	Gua zheng	Chuan chuan wa	Wa yan	Na si sui ti tuo	Wa zhi chi ni tuo	Wa zhi chi sa tuo	Wa zhi chi li tuo	Wa po li	Wa dui ma
Music	**Slow** (♩=90) → **Fast** (♩=130)											
Footwork	**Easy** → **Complex**											

Figure 5.3 Description of the 12-section footwork of waqi in Laoyashu village.

According to the members of *waqi* teams in Weixi, *waqi* is the most authentic and representative Lisu dance and they believe that the dances of other Lisu populations, such as *achi mugua* and *gaqie*, are less typical comprising variations of the traditional *waqi* basis. Li Zizhong, for example, offered this evaluation:

> You won't often see a dance as rich and traditional as the one we have here. We have been playing these Lisu instruments from ancient times until now. This is how Lisu dances have been performed since ancient times while playing these instruments. Nowadays, people in Lijiang and Nujiang hardly ever utilize the *qiben* or *jizi*; instead, they play the mouth organ when dancing just like any other minority group, such as Yi and Naxi people. (Li Zizhong, personal interview, Laoyashu, Lahezhu Village, 27 May 2021)

When I asked for more explanation on the history of *waqi*, members of the *waqi* team in almost every village were able to offer an account. However, the versions that circulated in each village differed in detail, even in the same hamlets, and indeed the narrative of every dancer could differ. To provide an additional context for my investigations, I have gathered two stories about *waqi* that are widely circulated in Weixi. One of them has been documented in several research reports, and the recorded versions are almost identical. Consequently, I will refrain from providing an elaborate retelling of the story and will only present a concise overview. The story concerns a beautiful bird that came to a certain place and laid three eggs. However, only two of the eggs hatched, and two baby boys were born. These boys then travelled along the headwaters of a great river in search of a better life. The older brother followed one of the rivers and eventually married a bird girl, forming the "Bird Clan". The younger brother followed the other river and married a fish girl, forming the "Fish Clan".

Over time, their descendants continued to grow and prosper, and the Lisu people lived in peace and happiness, ultimately becoming a thriving community (see further Weixi Lisuzu Zizhixian Wenhua Tiyu Ju [WLZWTJ], 2010:237).

Zhou have pointed out that the symbolic meaning and movement of *waqi* is closely related to this story, with each paragraph having a specific meaning. For example, in the third paragraph, the two brothers embark on their journey, fighting against birds and beasts in the swaying smoke and vines, hence the dance steps imitate the movements of a crow walking. Another example is in the seventh paragraph, where the two brothers settle down, start a family, and engage in farming and production, "na si sui" means rubbing the husks off of the rice with one's feet, and the dance movement imitates this action (Zhou 2009: 6 and 12).

The other version of the story I present remains unrecorded in prior research. Because of this, I provide an account below from dancers in Baijixun Township, and the transcription that follows was offered up to me not only by one person, but by all the members of the *waqi* team together. The main narrator of story was Xu Xiangdong but everyone present joined in to add details to the story, and there was great excitement as they constructed this account together. Although the story is presented here in a few paragraphs, it took around an hour for them to give their version of the tale. This is because whenever the members' individual memories differed on a particular detail of the storyline, they would engage in discussion with the others, to come up with a unified version.

> There were two families once upon a time in a village. One was a Hui family [Chinese Muslim], and the other was a Lisu family. Children born into Hui families were raised on sows' milk, and when they grow up, they worship pigs as ancestors and do not eat pork. The Lisu family butchered the pig for supper one day. The Hui family's young child innocently went to the Lisu home to consume it. After the meal, the Lisu family gave the child a string of pig intestines, which he hung around his neck and walked home with. When the Hui child returned home, his parents saw it and got very angry. So, the two families got into a fight. They started as two families battling during the day and resting at night in the village. Later, it developed to bi-ethnic group conflicts that stretched from the riverbank to the mountains.
>
> After seven years, both sides had suffered heavy casualties and were exhausted. One night, the Lisu were on the hillside and sat down to rest. Someone took a piece of wood and pulled a few strings, probably horse strings, onto the middle of it which made a nice sound when played, and this was the predecessor of the *qiben*. So, the group fought during the day and sat together at night, playing with the *qiben* in their hands. Gradually, they played a rhythm, and everyone started dancing to the rhythm of the footsteps. The Hui noticed a group of Lisu people engaged in activity every evening and doing regular footwork together. Since the Hui were too far away to observe closely, they assumed the Lisu were training troops. The Hui

> decided to stop fighting and sent a wood engraving over to inform the Lisu that they were no longer warring and wanted to ask for peace. The war between the two tribes eventually ended. Since the two groups don't speak, a boat was used to contact each other. Later, in order to commemorate the wood engraving and the boat, the Lisu people separately made the instruments *magu* and *jizi* according to the shape of each, using them to accompany *waqi* (Xu Xiangdong and others from Baijixun, collective story-telling and personal communication, 4 May 2021).

As narrated in the story, before the Lisu adopted writing, they used wood engravings, knots or gestures as means of communication. In addition to this story about *waqi*, the earliest documentation of Lisu dance that I have been able to find so far was recorded by Prince Henri d'Orléans when he was travelling in the Lameti valley on 7th August 1895. The use of instruments and the manner in which the villagers danced is consistent with *waqi* as it occurs today:

> 7th August 1895…. Our hosts at Lameti consented to perform a dance for our benefit, and a threshing-floor having been turned into the ball room, the orchestra tuned up. It consisted of four musicians – a flageolet, a violin with two strings, a guitar with four, and an instrument of slender bamboo strips made to vibrate upon the teeth. This last was played by an old woman, who was also mistress of the ceremonies. The air, though not very varied, was soft and rhythmic. The dancers formed a ring and began from their stations, alternately advancing and withdrawing their legs. Presently the villagers, male and female, gathered behind the circle and commenced to beat time loudly with their feet. (d'Orléans 1898: 196-7)

After many generations of migration, the village of Lameti no longer exists. However, during a conversation with Li Guiming, I mentioned the village and provided a description. Li Guiming used the prince's itinerary and surrounding geography mentioned in d'Orléans' book, as well as the fact that people can walk 15 km in a day, to deduce that the "Lameti" referred to in the book is likely Lumidi (鲁米底), a village located in the southern region of Weixi. According to Li Guiming, Lumidi is a Lisu term, where "Lu" refers to sorghum, "mi" refers to land, and "di" refers to a plain. Therefore, the name *Lumidi* signifies a plain where sorghum is grown (personal communication, 18 April 2021).

5.2.2 Achi mugua

The dance styles that are prevalent in the northern region of Weixi exhibit notable dissimilarities from the aforementioned southern *waqi*. *Achi mugua* is popular in the villages of Kangpu, Yezhi and Badi in northern Weixi, an area which is very close indeed to the Tibetan region. In Lisu language, *achi* means goat and *mugua* means tune, so the overall

meaning is goat tune. My Lisu informants told me they named it so because its singing and dance movements are based on the imitation of goats' cries and habits (see Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4 Achi mugua, Kangpu village, Weixi Lisu Autonomous County, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

The Lisu people appear to have a remarkable affinity for and ability to perceive the timbre and rhythm of nature's sounds. Yu Yongxing, whose experience parallels that of Li Biqing mentioned in Chapter 2, is regarded as one of the top performers at imitating sheep singing in Achi Dagga Village of Badi Township. Unfortunately, an agricultural accident a few years ago left him unable to walk. He described spending a year in deep frustration, hiding at home and not wanting to go anywhere. A turning point came when the village needed to form an *achi mugua* dance troupe. He expressed profound gratitude to the villagers, knowing they wanted to help him recover his spirits, which is why they made him the group leader. Subsequent activities and rehearsals saw high participation from the villagers. In order not to let them down, Yu took on the responsibility of applying for projects, choreographing dances and music, and organizing rehearsals (Figure 5.5). It is hard for me to fully grasp the hardships he must face with each step he takes, especially considering that not all of his commuting routes are yet covered by concrete roads. One image that remains etched in my memory is from before the rehearsals when a group of young men would arrive early at Yu

Yongxing's home. They would lift him onto their backs, traversing bumpy or steep paths to get to the rehearsal site, a practice I understand has been in place for many years now.



Figure 5.5 Yu Yongxing (right), holding a microphone, is singing to provide accompaniment for the achi mugua in Badi, Weixi County, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

As a well-spoken individual with an excellent command of Mandarin Chinese, Yu Yongxing shared his personal insights on singing and dancing in interview. He reminisced about his days herding sheep in the cool, shaded forests of the mountains, where his voice would reverberate, birds would react to the rustling leaves, and sheep would respond to his calls with their own unique sounds.

> Sheep herding used to take place in the large forest in the mountains, where it was always cool and sheltered once you entered however hot the weather was outside. When you are singing in the woods, your voices echoed in the forest; when we blew on the leaves, birds began to chirp; and when we roared, the sheep responded with their bleating sounds. Listen, every sound has its own pattern and rhythm. Whether it's birds or sheep, their frequencies are different. When you hear these sounds, your feet just can't help but follow the beat. And as you tap along, you naturally start dancing. (Yu Yongxing, personal interview, Achi daga Village, 6 April 2021).

Clearly, there are significant differences in the core characteristics between the *achi mugua* in the north and the *waqi* in the south. The primary contrast is their musical accompaniment, where *achi mugua* no longer employs instruments but rather uses singing to accompany the dance. In terms of choreography, *achi mugua* features a greater range of movements, which

encompass lateral and sagittal swaying in tandem with step changes and are accentuated with simple hand gestures.

I was wondering where these characteristics that distinguish them from the long-standing *waqi* come from? In seeking out the origins of these various characteristics, it is worth noting that this area is geographically close to Tibet. *Achi mugua* is easily reminiscent of the famous and popular Tibetan folk dance *gorshey (*གོར་གཤེད*)*, known also by the homophonic *guozhuang* in Chinese (Yang et al. 2010:188). It is generally explained by Tibetans as a performing circle comprising singing and dancing, and is a collective circle song and dance performed for self-entertainment. With the popularization of Chinese in ethnic areas, the title *guozhuang* has basically become used in place of the traditional *gorshey* in Tibetan areas of all provinces. According to Huang, *guozhuang* dance is generally performed in a circle with one person in the lead (2013). It is accompanied by singing and does not use musical instruments. In addition to the foot movements, the dancers change their posture mainly by lifting, shaking, and swaying their arms. These characteristics are precisely the main differencse between *achi mugua* in the north and the southern *waqi*.

Given these considerations, I conducted interviews with members of *achi mugua* regarding the apparent resemblances between *achi mugua* and *guozhuang*. They replied that they did not see a strong relationship between the two, or else that they had not even thought about it. Yu Yongxing, for instance, stated:

> We have always danced like this in our whole life; it has been handed down from previous generations.… Our footwork is quite different from theirs [*guozhuang*], and we also sing differently.… *Achi mugua* also appears in a lot of oral Lisu stories (Yu Yongxing, personal interview, Achi daga Village, 26 April 2021).

Similarly, the origin of *achi mugua* was explained through oral history. Unlike the various versions circulating of *waqi*'s origin, the story of *achi mugua* I heard was quite unified across the north of Weixi (see further Luo 2021, Yang 2015). Here is a version recounted by villagers from Badi township.

> In the village of Tongle (formerly known as Tuoluola), a young couple had a son. When the son was 13-14 years old, his father took him hunting in the mountains to feed his family. The son hunted day after day, without marrying or having children, until he was 30 years old. One day, as usual, the son went into the primeval forest alone to hunt and saw a muntjac. In the process of chasing and hunting, the muntjac suddenly turned into a very tall and stout goat, which said to the youngster "from today you will not hunt any more, you have killed many of my animals, you will go home now". The young man didn't respond for a moment, still

puzzled that he had clearly been chasing a muntjac which had turned into a goat and was now talking. The goat then said, “Don’t ask me what I am, just listen to me and follow whatever you come across, hear or dream tonight. I am the master of your house and of this mountain.” Then, the goat disappeared. The young man followed his words and did not continue hunting and went home.

When he returned home, their parents looked at their son who had returned empty-handed, and said, “You come back from hunting every day with your trophy on your back, how come you didn’t get anything today? Are you not feeling well or something?” The son told his parents what had happened while hunting. Her mother assumed he had met a god. To calm her son’s fears, she told him to go rest without doing any work. When the young man fell asleep, he began to dream. He dreamed of an old man said, “Your house has many gourds on the door panel at the entrance, and inside each gourd I have filled with different seeds, and I will teach you when and how to plant these seeds. Then, you can get food by planting these seeds.” When he woke up the next day, he found the gourds near the door panel as the old man had said in his dream, and just as the old man had said, they were all filled with seeds. The son told his parents about it and planted the seeds with his family. The next night, the old man appeared in his dream again. The old man said to the son, “It is very difficult for you to drink water now as you have to go down the mountain to the big river and pick water to come back. And the location your family chose to live is not good, that is why your family is so sparsely populated. When you wake up tomorrow, take the ashes from the fire pit inside the house, and take some seeds I gave you. Follow this path to the east, and you will meet a fortune teller who will be able to assist you in finding a location with a good water source and fortune, where you can make your home.”

When he woke up, he took some ashes from the fire and some seeds as the old man had said and walked in an easterly direction to find the fortune teller. When the young man reached a more remote and steep path, he found an old man with abscesses all over his body lying in the middle of the road. He helped the old man to the side of the road and the old man said to him “Young man, are you going to find a fortune teller?” “How do you know?” I can tell from your face, and I'll tell your fortune for you, since you’ve helped me.” The old man took out fortune-telling paraphernalia from his pockets and gave young man a piece of paper after chanting, telling him “Please follow this paper and when the paper falls and is not blown up by the wind again, that place is where you should make your home.” The son thanked the old man and followed the paper until he arrived at the location where he and his parents could newly settle down.

The next night, the old man appeared in his dream again, singing and dancing. The old man explained to the young man what he was dancing and singing, as well as how to sing and dance with each movement and melody. When he woke up from his dream, the dream he had last night was vividly remembered. He taught these dances to his parents who were impressed and asked their son if this dance had a name. The son said no, but since the talking mountain god who gave them all this good life looked like a goat, they decided to call the song and dance “*achi mugua*”! The Lisu people who lived on this land gradually formed a village from that very small family, and the people in the village relied on the methods taught in the son’s dream to cultivate the land for food and learn the songs and dances for entertainment (Yu Yongxing, personal interview, Achi Daga Village, Badi Township, 9 June 2021).

This story, like the previous story of the *waqi*, conveys the importance of respecting and maintaining ecological balance, where all living beings coexist and thrive together in a harmonious manner. The talking goat represents the spirit of the mountains and animals, who are the guardians of the land and have been respected for generations. The young hunter learns to listen to the goat's voice and stops hunting, instead accepting seeds and guidance on how to cultivate the land for food.

Aside from the *achi mugua* origin tale, the customs, movement, and vocal music are also similar in Kangpu, Yezhi and Badi Township. This is a usual phenomenon from the situation of Lisu music culture more generally. I interviewed the members and leaders of *achi mugua* from Yezhi, Badi and Kangpu Townships separately.

> We didn't used to dance like this before, but the Tongle's *achi mugua* dance became so popular and well-known that people from outside began to think that it's the only way to dance in Tongle. Sometimes during rehearsals and performances, we intentionally dance and sing like Tongle's *achi mugua* (member of *achi mugua* team of Badi Township, personal interview, 9 June 2021).

> The top (county government) comes to inspect and observe, they will make some requests, including a uniform costume for the performance, and singing the tune that we all know (Tongle's *achi mugua* tune), (Feng Zhixiong, personal interview, Kangpu Township, 25 March 2021).

The reason why *achi mugua* in Tongle Village, Yezhi Township, Weixi County has had such a strong impact in the north is because it this village was selected as the site for a national intangible cultural heritage programme dedicated to this genre in 2006. Overall, this programme has been successful, providing many opportunities for support and help in terms of cultural transmission. However, this intervention and guidance may mean that the dance is becoming more standardized and patterned. As mentioned, all of these dances were originally devised for self-entertainment and so are what Thomas Turino labels participatory performances. Compared to presentational performances, the purpose of this type of dance is to involve as many people as possible in a performance role rather than simply perform to a separate audience (Turino 2008:26). When, in ICH programme interventions, local Lisu people are asked to showcase their dance, they may initially be a little overwhelmed since they usually dance just for fun. The significant influence of Tongle Village's *achi mugua* in the local area, coupled with the repeated rehearsals and movement instructions driven by new target of presentational performance, may have led to an increasing uniformity in the dances across various villages over the last two decades.

Next, we see how the use of voice as the main accompaniment in *achi mugua* represents a departure from the traditional use of instruments in *waqi*. This may reflect a shift towards a greater emphasis on vocal expression and storytelling in *achi mugua*, as opposed to the instrumental virtuosity of *waqi*. Despite these differences, one common element between *achi mugua* and *waqi* is the regular and loud sounds of feet striking the floor. Amidst the towering mountains, the melodious bleats of goats echo through the valley, accompanied by the synchronized beat of many feet striking the floor. Each step resounds with a rhythmic force that pierce the soul. As team leader Yu Yongxing aptly stated, "the soul of this dance lies in the powerful combination of loud singing and forceful foot stomping on the ground."

5.2.3 Gaqie

Gaqie, also known as *guaqie* or *gaber* in the Lisu language and *datiao* (打跳) in Chinese, is Lisu dance named by Lisu people primarily found in the Jinsha river basin, Lijiang prefecture. Unlike Weixi, Lijiang is a tourist city, and famous for its UNESCO Heritage Site, the Old Town of Lijiang. This is the second largest Lisu settlement with a Lisu population of more than 104,000, spread across four counties in the mountainous area. However, the Lisu here account for only 9.3% of Lijiang's total population. The majority of the residents come from the Naxi and Yi ethnic groups. The experiences of the Lisu people in Lijiang, as a non-dominant minority in the region, contrast to those of the Lisu people in Weixi County, where they are a dominant group.

The social dance function and participatory nature of *gaqie* make it well-suited for the tourism industry in Lijiang. Whether performed at tourist attractions such as the Old Town of Lijiang or in public squares like Hongtaiyang Square, *gaqie* is a highlight that attracts tourists to participate (see Figure 4.6).



Figure 5.6 Tourists dancing gaqie in the Old City of Lijiang, 2020. Photo by Keyi Liu.

One notable change relating to tourism and urbanization is the use of sound equipment to provide accompaniment for dance. The music selected is either *maniu* electronic music, a genre that blends traditional *maniu* tunes with modern electronic dance music elements, or some Lisu singers' popular songs with a prominent beat, like Ashicai's "Zilalei".[26] As mentioned in Chapter 3, the *maniu*, also known as *apubi* in Lisu language and *hulusheng* (葫芦笙) in Chinese, is a gourd mouth organ that holds significant music cultural importance among several minority groups in Yunnan, including the Yi, Naxi and Miao.

Use of these kinds of dance accompaniment music is a departure from the traditional practice of relying solely on live instruments, a tradition adhered to by most Lisu people residing in the mountains surrounding Lijiang city when it comes to festivals, events or small-scale entertainment, where they typically invite a musician playing the *maniu* to perform live while the audience dances along. One Lisu consultant told me that both *gaqie* and *waqi* employ instruments for dance and the musicians play the instrument while dancing at the same time, they differ in that *gaqie* exclusively utilizes the *maniu*. Typically, the dance team is led by one or two *maniu* players who either stand at the front of the team or in the centre of the circle (Figure 5.7). Each tune can be played repeatedly, and the participants dancing follow the rhythm of the music until it finishes. During the performance, the musicians not only play their instruments but also observe the participants" foot movements to ensure they are keeping up with the rhythm. The musicians may adjust the melody or rhythm if necessary.

[26] "Zilalei (子拉勒)" is online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xnk3s1UWOro, accessed 18 April 2023.

More important, the participants need to listen carefully to the music to know when a switch to a new tune requires a new set of dance movements.



Figure 5.7 Gaqie in daily life, Yantou village, Yongsheng county, Lijiang, 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

When it comes to the *maniu* tune, a common saying is that "We have seventy-two *maniu* tunes. Unfortunately, as time has passed, many of them have been lost." From the tune names mentioned in the interviews, I found that many tunes are related to production and daily life, such as "Driving the Deer" (赶鹿), "Weaving Hemp Cloth" (织麻布), "Threshing Millet" (打小米), "Pulling Up Rice Shoots" (拔秧), "Knocking Walnuts" (敲核桃), and "Cutting Rice Shoots" (割秧). There are also tunes that imitate the movements and sounds of nature and plants, such as "The Crow Drinking Water Tune" (乌鸦喝水调), "The Warbler Tune" (莺歌调), "The Blue Swallowtail Bird Tune" (蓝色燕尾鸟调), and "The Mountain Goat Gathering Tune" (山羊采食物调).

I was curious as to why I rarely saw Lisu in this region using their own traditional instruments, such as *qiben* and *jizi*. Upon conducting inquiries with locals, I discovered that

although certain individuals possessed the ability to play these instruments, the requirement for handcrafted production rendered them challenging to obtain. In contrast, the *maniu*, being produced on a larger scale, is more accessible. Furthermore, the louder sound probuced by the *maniu* makes it more suitable for group dancing in comparison to *qiben* or *jizi*, which produce a softer sound. Thirdly, the popularity of the *maniu* among various minority groups in this region cannot be denied. It is significant not only as a musical instrument but also as cultural symbol that unites diverse communities.

This raises another question: if other minority groups living in this area also use the *maniu* as the accompanying instrument for dance, how do the Lisu differentiate their dance *gaqie* from those of other groups? Furthermore, how do they identify themselves through the dance? To this question, Li Xuehua explained:

> Our tunes are different from theirs. In the past, we had 72 tunes. Actually, many tunes were learned by other groups from us. Each of our tunes has a corresponding dance, and some of them can't be learned by others. They usually learn the simplest ones. For the difficult ones, they don't know how to dance…. It's easy to distinguish – once the tune is played, you'll know if it's Lisu or not, as it has a unique Lisu rhythm. (Li Xuehua, personal interview, Lijiang City, January 7, 2021).

5.3 Analysis of Circle Dances, Dance-Driven Music, and Intangible Culture Heritage Practice

Each of these three dances is taken as representative of Lisu dance within its respective locale but is not found in the other two areas. It is interesting to observe the differences in Lisu music and dance characteristics across various residential area, based on ethnic migration routes. These differences could be attributed to a combination of factors, including cultural collision among different ethnic groups in each geographical location. The influences of intangible cultural heritage management and other types of governmental intervention cannot be ignored, as they have undoubtedly played a role in shaping the development of these dances. To better compare and explain the impacts of these various factors, I have created a brief comparative chart (Figure 5.8).

			waqi	***achi mugua***	***gaqie***
differences	Music	instruments	*qiben, jizi, jülü*	--	*maniu*
		voice	--	chorus	--
	Dance steps		vary depending on each location		
points of stability	Inspiration		environment, non-human beings, life		
	Role of steps		percussive role		
	Ethos		participatory performance		

Figure 5.8 Three dance types in comparison.

Based on Fig. 4.10, it is evident that the main differences between each dance lie in their steps and music. Dance steps vary in each location, but the underlying inspiration for them is consistent: in each case, footwork and movement closely relates to animal imitation, hunting activities, and daily life. Some dances imitate the living habits of animals, while others have evolved from the cheers and leaps of joy upon obtaining prey, gradually becoming basic dance movements such as stomping, twisting the body left and right, and swinging arms back and forth. Additionally, some movements are derived from actions in daily work and production, such as pounding rice and preparing textiles. A second apparent difference among the three dance styles, concerns their selection of accompanying musical instruments and vocal elements. However, it is clear that there are deeper commonalities among all three here too: the role and importance of dance steps within the overall performance, and the consistent reliance upon a participatory ethos (at least until recent developments). As such, while these dances look and sound rather dissimilar, they are actually fundamentally quite alike.

I am well aware that when comparing cultures from different regions and communities, there are bound to be differences *and* similarities, even within the same ethnic group, this is especially true of the Lisu people who have migrated extensively. Besides observing these differences, my intention is to avoid superficial comparisons and instead delve deeper (through analysis) into the more stable core of their dances. I believe this may be the key to understanding how the Lisu differentiate their Lisu dance from the cultural expressions of

surrounding groups and maintain a distinct cultural identity, at least from their own perspectives.

5.3.1 Why Do Lisu People Dance in a Circle?

Lisu dances often involve spinning in circles, a feature that remains consistent across different locations (Figure 5.9). Many scholars have explored why this circular dance is so popular. Some scholars argue that aesthetic and symbolic reasons factors contribute to its appeal. as the circular shape is aesthetically pleasing and can represent various symbolic meanings, such as unity, continuity and the cyclical nature of life. In some cultures, the circular form may also be linked to spiritual beliefs or the natural world. For instance, when researching Yi people's wedding dances, Mueggler discovered that when the bride departs her natal home, her family performs a dance said to restore, bring back and welcome souls, effectively preventing their souls from following the bride and mitigating feelings of sorrow and loneliness (2002: 29).

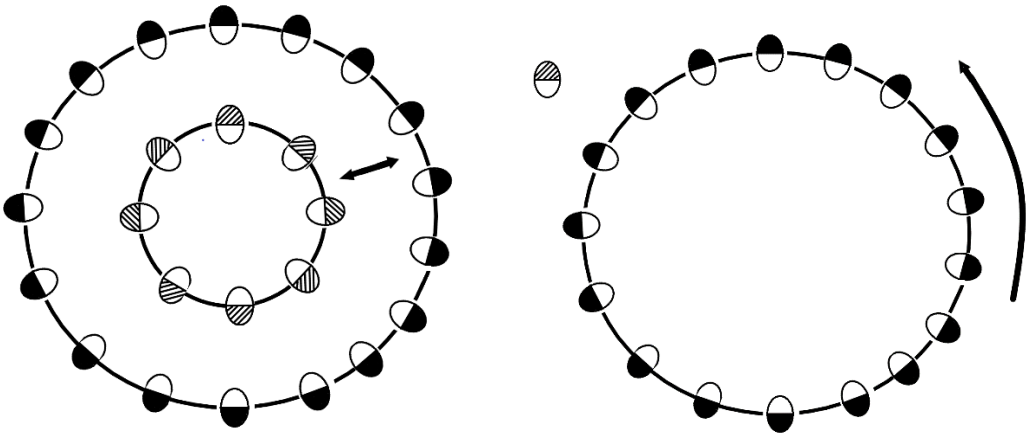


Figure 5.9 The basic formation of Lisu dance. Drawn by Keyi Liu.

Generally, the Lisu people's living environment is relatively isolated, with inconvenient transportation and few opportunities for communication with the outside world. Collective dance serves as an entertaining activity that promotes communication and interaction with neighbours and with visitors from other ethnic groups or regions alike. Participatory dancing thus promotes understanding among individuals while also serving as a platform for socializing, flirting, and attracting others. As Anca Giurchescu clams, "the dancer becomes a

very sensitive medium, able to express and transmit feelings, experiences and ideas which, at a deep level of significance, are not verbally translatable" (2001:110).

As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, the Lisu people, due to their shy nature, tend to express their emotions and certain unspeakable matters through metaphorical lyrics and the use of musical instruments that can "speak." Similarly, in their dances, the Lisu people have some unwritten, conventionally understood metaphorical movements. For example, while dancing, if you encounter someone you are attracted to, you can directly approach them and naturally separate them from another person, then hold their hand and the other person's hand. After holding their hand, if you want to express your feelings, you can use the index finger of the hand holding theirs to gently tap their palm, and they will understand your intentions. If she/he is not interested in you, they may politely walk away when the next circle dance begins or when switching to another dance. If the other person shares your feelings, the two of you can go to the mountains for some private time after the dance (Ashicai, personal conversation, Louhai Village, 29 November 2020). When Ashicai told me about this, I suddenly had an epiphany. As Ashicai shared this information with me, I recalled that a few days earlier during the dance, a young man persistently tapped my palm. At the time, I was unaware of the hidden meaning behind his gesture and neither tapped back nor walked away at the next break. We danced together, hand in hand, for an extended period, while he was presumably trying to work out whether or not I was interested in pursuing a deeper connection.

Dancing in a circle also allows for optimal use of the available space, accommodating a large number of participants while ensuring that everyone has enough room to move. It reflects a concept akin to what Thomas Turino might term a "participatory performance," diminishing the lines between performer and spectator by involving the maximum number of people in a collaborative, dynamic participation (Turino 2008:26). The essence is to create a shared experience, fostering unity and collective involvement rather than individual prominence. Such a context encourages those present to enter a state of flow, a participatory form of entertainment and enjoyment. In this state, people appear to dance tirelessly, becoming more relaxed as they continue until the break of dawn (see further details in Chapter 5 on dance at the wedding ceremony).

Additionally, another important reason might be the Lisu's mountainous climate. Some literature suggests that dancing in cold and high-altitude climates helps to ward off the cold

and increase the body's resistance to it. The chilly mountain climate posed a significant threat to the early inhabitants who wore animal skins or tree leaves around their waists. To resist the cold, people would gather around a bonfire, holding hands and standing shoulder to shoulder. They would stomp their feet and dance with force to increase blood circulation and enhance the body's ability to withstand the cold. According to Liu Jinwu, this is the primary reason for the forceful stomping and circular dancing in minority groups in southwest Yunnan (1996:130).

Notably, a circle formation allows for easy addition or removal of participants, making it an inclusive dance form that can flexibly accommodate numerous dancers. Musicians tailor their tunes based on the composition of the participants. For instance, in relatively smaller communities or dance troupes, they might play a complete suite, such as the *waqi*'s 1-12 feet. If there are many outsiders, the musicians primarily play simpler tunes. Simultaneously, to meet the expectations of the local villagers, they would perform some of more complex tunes as well. As the tunes and dance steps increase in complexity, most people choose to continue dancing. Some learn on the go, possibly mastering the sequence after just three rotations. Inevitably, there are also those who struggle to keep up or make mistakes, but no one seems to mind. These individuals sway with the rhythm of the music, carrying out the simplest footwork as they rotate with the circle, their faces reflecting the enjoyment of the communal atmosphere. There are also those who, whether due to fatigue or difficulty keeping up, choose to step out of the circle at any time or place. After resting, or upon hearing a tune they're familiar with, they readily rejoin the dance. This ongoing ebb and flow of participants underscores the flexible, inclusive nature of the dance and further contributes to its dynamic rhythm and energy.

Drawing from the points mentioned earlier, it is evident that everyone in the Lisu community, regardless of age or gender, participates in dancing, albeit at differing levels of skill and ambition. Foster highlights the significance of participatory communal movement, emphasizing the body's role in "enacting" such principles into larger arenas of meaning (1995: 8). In other words, in Lisu dance, every person's contribution to the dance is valued. In some cultures, there are those who dislike the involvement of certain others, especially beginners, and their inept or clumsy contributions to music and dance (Turino 2008:33). However, in the context of the Lisu culture, the situation seems to be different: on the contrary, communal participation is considered crucial to whether the dance is lively, the atmosphere is appropriate, and the event is successful.

I asked many Lisu participants "why do you dance in a circle?" The common response were "happiness!" and "it's our traditional custom, passed down through generations." Happiness is in fact a very frequently mentioned value among the Lisu people, and it seems to lie at the core of their way of life. Meanwhile, when dance team members emphasized the "ancient" element of their traditional dance, they were highlighting their shared ethnic and cultural identity as a minority group within larger national and global multi-ethnic contexts, a point taken up further in the conclusion of this thesis.

5.3.2 If We Didn't Dance, We Wouldn't Know How to Play the Music": the Significance of Foot Movements, Collective Cognitive and Improvisation.

Although each of the three dances has its own unique set of dance steps, the dance steps in each small community remain stable and consistent. Additionally, the part of music within each community is relatively stable, though I say "relatively" because the same musicians playing at another time and place can produce slightly different melodies. For example, I sometimes I asked *waqi* ensemble members to sit down and play again the music part after they had finished dancing so I could obtain a better-quality recording. When I analysed the transcriptions (see appendix), I could see that the tune is played or improvised differently each time, but the rhythm and framework remain relatively stable.

Speaking to me about these different melodies, many members of *waqi* ensemble say that they do not think much about or form abstractable conceptions of melody or beat when they compose and play. To gain a better visual understanding of and raise further questions about their artistry, I also tried to transcribe and analyse the melodic framework of an entire *waqi* (12 sections) in Pantiange village (see Chapter 4.3.4). As can be observed from the score, as the steps become more complex and the phrases grow longer, it becomes more difficult to divide up the music into segments because the dance steps are no longer falling into clearly demarcated units of three or four beats. In sections 1 to 3, I can use 5/4, 7/4, and 9/4 to show the groupings which occur in the patterns of foot movements (Figure 5.10). From part 8 onwards, the complexity of the footwork makes it impossible for me to confidently divide up sections in such a way (see Figure 5.11). As a result, this does not appear to be an appropriate approach. What is more, I had asked the musicians to sit and play without dancing so that I could record the music parts at a higher quality and without some of the noise caused by

dancing and the movement of different instruments toward or away from the microphone. But the musicians found this difficult, and I saw that their feet were still dancing even while they sat down to play. As Li Zizhong put it:

> If we didn't dance, we would not know how to play the music. If you don't play according to the pattern of the footsteps, you won't follow the light and heavy notes of the steps, and you're definitely playing it wrong. Then, everyone's footsteps will follow you in a mess. So, when you learn to dance, you will naturally be able to play. (Li Zizhong, personal interview, Laoyashu, Lahezhu Village, 15 April 2021)

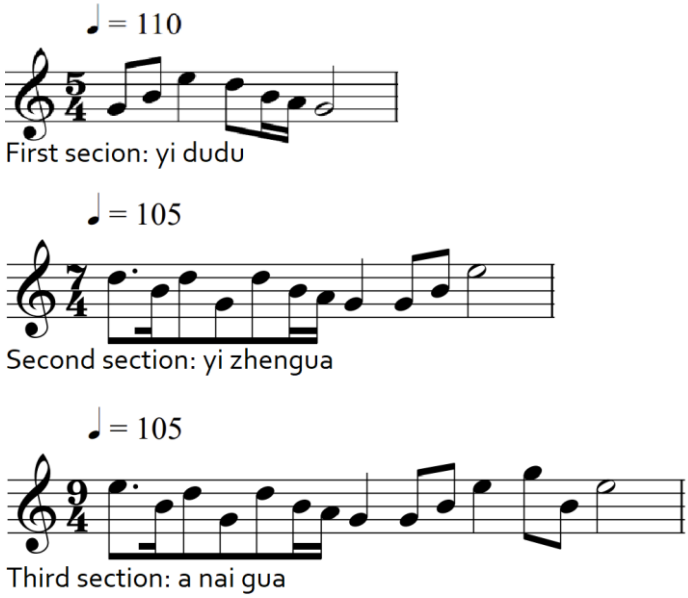


Figure 5.10 Music corresponding to the footwork sequences in waqi dance sections 1-3. Transcribed by Keyi Liu.



Figure 5.11 Sheet music corresponding to the footwork sequence in waqi dance section 10. Transcribed by Keyi Liu.

Therefore, mastering the dance steps themselves is not only a prerequisite for participation in a full Lisu dance but is essential also for the accompanying instrumentalists (and for any would-be transcriber/analyst). The role of the feet in the dance reminds me of the role of percussion in an ensemble. Although Li Zizhong did not provide further detailed explanations, I believe that the perspectives obtained by Hill, Kate and Nannaphat in their

observation of dance by Yunnan's Lahu ethnicity is essentially consistent with what I observed among the Lisu:

> Lahu dancers say that the music tells them which sequence of steps and phrases to perform, when to switch sequences, and which sequence to switch to at any given moment. The dancing musician makes the musical decisions, and the other dancers follow along without missing a beat (Hill, Kate and Nannaphat 2011: 146-7).

Musicians may make variations in the melodies they play for the same dance; however, such variations must retain a cadence that fits the specific sequence of phrases and pauses that dancers hear as a given (ibid.:148). According to my observations, these three dances (including their dance moves, songs, and instrumental pieces) are still taught and transmitted orally and through participatory practice. This means of transmission is both rigorous and flexible. Part of its strictness is that Lisu dance music should be composed according to the "cadence" and rhythm of foot movements, which can be considered a fixed principle because it is a prerequisite for collective performance. It is not only the instrumental performers who need to know these rules, but also participants in the dance.

The flexible aspect lies in the freedom for individuality and improvisation among dancers and musicians, based on an understanding of footwork movement patterns. Improvisation is thus not random play, but an acquired ability. According to my Lisu consultants, their teaching method primarily involves students acquiring fundamental melodic elements and a framework before proceeding to learn from one another's performances. They eventually integrate these new melodic elements into their own playing, creating new versions and styles that can be studied by others to produce further variations in turn. An individual's "musical experience [can] move quite comfortably between the poles of the individual and collective; music is at once the outcome of individual creativity and creativity's grounding as social act" (Shelemay 2006: 22).

In this context, it is clear that Lisu music and dance utilize a collective mode of creation, with the act of making or improvising music influenced by collectively held cognitive patterns that uphold specific sound structures. As Pirkko Moisala has argued in her paper about the basic premises of cognitive ethnomusicology "examined from the micro perspective, cognitive models, processes of human thinking, and knowledge accumulate in the course of an individual lifetime. One the macro level, culture, ecological, social, and historical contexts formulate the cognitive models shared by people" (1995: 12-13). It is through this shared set

of models that Lisu people are able to sustain a distinctive Lisu dance music style that distinguishes them from the other ethnic groups around them. Such cognitive premises also provide a foundation for the improvisational space within which individuals can find and enjoy their own performative spaces within a wider collective whole.

Whenever my Lisu friends and I attend dance events during celebrations or weddings in another Lisu community, we encounter distinctive local dance styles that differ from our previous experiences. We all feel the need to learn these new steps on the spot in order to participate. This suggests that cognitive premises are not always shared across all types of Lisu dances or different communities, and immersion in smaller communities may be necessary to fully appreciate and understand their dance. It is worth noting that while the knowledge gained in one community may not be fully applicable in another, individuals with more experience and knowledge may still be able to draw connections between different communities' knowledge systems to some extent, as observed when attending dance events in different Lisu communities. As an example, when my Lisu friends and I are learning a dance with difficult steps during a live performance, they are often able to learn it after just three rotations, while I may struggle to remember the pattern even after ten rotations.

5.3.3 Government Politics and Intangible Culture Heritage

As mentioned above, all three of these dances are performed for self-entertainment, and share a participatory performance ethos. However, in the context of seeking Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) recognition, these dances seem to move toward the second ideal type identified by Turino, the presentational performance. This trend can be attributed to the fact that some individuals involved in ICH systems in China are not trained folklorists or ethnomusicologists, and they perceive traditional culture as colourful, but also as crude and in need of development. Li Wenlin, director of the Lisu Cultural Station in Liming, Lijiang, for instance, said:

> I think Lisu dance is not yet a theatrical art, and there is no dichotomy between performance and watching. Our dances are based on simple and repetitive steps and techniques so that everyone, even the beginners like you, can join in the dance. This kind of dance could perhaps be a precursor to the formation of complex dances, and is typical of primitive dances. (Li Wenlin, personal communication, Liming Township, 6 January 2021)

Moreover, they see presentation to tourist audiences as most likely to provide new income that could help support these steps. It is not just the Lisu in China; many other ethnic

minorities face a similar situation. For instance, Lonán Ó Briain's observations at the "Love Market" in Sa Pa, Vietnam illustrate that how the Hmong's traditional music and culture, which were once participatory, are now transformed into amplified performances for tourists, also driven by financial incentives. Such changes, while enhancing tourist appeal, can sometimes dilute the authenticity and essence of the cultural expression (Ó Briain 2018: 123-128).

Accordingly, a shift from self-entertainment to public performance may be seen as both inevitable and contradictory. While it opens doors to new opportunities and financial gains, it also poses challenges to the preservation of cultural inherent nature. So far, of the three dance types discussed above, *achi mugua* has begun to undergo such a shift. The leader of the Kangpu village *achi mugua* team Feng Zhixiong recounted that the villagers had to go through systematic rehearsals before each official performance that occurred as part of the ICH application, and they needed to make a psychological transition from the original self-entertainment mode to performance mode, that is, from participant to performer. Feng found this distressing because of dilute the nature of participant dance but he also strove to benefit for team from the wider opportunity that ICH listing would provide, such as performance opportunities and associated fees, as well as funding for related projects and subsidies.

> Lisu are usually very shy and modest. What's more, they don't know how to perform and have little experience as actors. So, although they dance very well in private, it's a completely different story on stage. But if we stand there afraid to sing or dance, we cannot be actors. I often tell them that we are now on stage, on stage means be crazy, so that the audience can see us.… Our previous movements were too simple, so I purposefully designed more movements to improve the overall look of the dance.
>
> As a result, I've been calling the team to rehearse for two hours every afternoon for the past few days (there's a show coming up next week), and everyone has volunteered to leave their farm work to come here. This is great, and I'm very impressed. (Li Zhixiong, personal interview, Kangpu Township, 9 June 2021)

Specific alterations Feng has introduced include the placing of special emphasis on the clarity of the leader's voice, expanding the height of the dancers' jumps, the magnitude of their bends, and the strength of their head shakes. Other vocal and dance expressions have also been revised to develop a more infectious intensity. The impressively coordinated costumes and movements shown in Figure 5.4 above may stem in part from these recent transformations.

Achi mugua's success in meeting the expectations of the intangible culture heritage system has not only the potential to transform that local dance but also provides an instance that other Lisu dancers may choose to follow. The standardized dissemination of stories and music and dance related to *achi mugua* has, to some extent, enhanced the historical standing of Tongle Village as a cultural centre. However, at the same time, it has also disrupted the sense of identity and original atmosphere surrounding *achi mugua* within other villages, which are now overshadowed by that example, and need to imitate it if they do not wish to be judged inauthentic. Inspired by *achi mugua*'s case in northern Weixi, the relevant local government organizations further south is now emphasizing and promoting *waqi* in turn. According to an officer of the Lisu Culture Department of the Minzu Bureau in Weixi, "We also want to declare *waqi* as an intangible culture heritage in the next two years. We are preparing an application at city level, then at province level, and then at national level, to see how far it can go" (Li Guiming. personal communication, Weixi County, 28 June 2021). In this process, *waqi* will inevitably become the object of pressure to conform to the expectations of the ICH system and of China's fairly recent wave of folklore tourism. If so, it may also turn from a form a self-entertainment to a dance shaped for public presentation to outsiders.

5.4 Conclusion

From these three case-studies, we can see that diversity emerges in many vibrant ways within the musical culture of the Lisu people who live in separate river basins despite being only a short distance apart on the map. Differences appear to have emerged from factors closely related to the special local geographical conditions, migration routes and proximity to neighbouring ethnic groups in each area of settlement. According to the interviews, the majority of dance team members and participants from all three dance teams strongly believe that their music and dance movement are unique. They also express a preference not to frequently compare their dances with those from other places, or to question which one is more authoritative or representative of the Lisu tribe's dance. This might serve as a reminder: traditional music and dance cannot, and perhaps should not, be compared or analysed as the definitive Lisu dance characteristic or theory. "People often say that diversity is good, so why

cannot our Lisu dance be diverse as well?" (Li Zizhong, personal interview, Laoyashu, Lahezhu Village, 15 April 2021).

Nevertheless, my research has also revealed some fundamental similarities in dance culture and practice in each locale and has foregrounded a practice of rationalizing adopted dance materials from adjacent populations into Lisu narratives. Alongside this, Lisu people have clearly taken efforts to maintain stylized elements of their music and dance during the process of creation and transmission: the matching of patterned footwork to melodic components remains strong in all three cases.

Most crucially, dance culture across all the Lisu societies is founded on circle dances with a participatory ethos. This traditional emphasis on participation allows for the fostering of social relations and social cohesion, whether between relative strangers, old friends and family members, or prospective lovers, and it also allows the progressive development of considerable skill, such that sustained participation rewards those who develop their dance steps with the greatest dedication to remain engaged with one another in the dance group through the whole 12 sections of a *waqi* performance. The situation was already dynamic, with distinct versions of Lisu dance developing in each locale. It is now under new threat, as ICH programmes from the Han "superculture" (see further Slobin 1992) bring a new display-oriented ideology to the fore.

In conclusion, the study of music and dance in Weixi has provided me with a rich opportunity to explore the intersection of culture, history and geography. By examining the differences and similarities between *waqi*, *achi mugua* and *gaqie*, I have gained a deeper understanding of the ways in which these dances have evolved and adapted over time. Through their multiple approaches to dance, the Lisu people manifest the embodiment of music while expressing elements as diverse as their cosmology, collective memory, personal desire and ability to display traditional instrumental performance. I hope the findings in this chapter offer a nuanced appreciation of the benefits of cultural and performative diversity even within a relatively small-scale ethnic minority population.

Chapter 6 Lisu Wedding Ceremonies: Music and Dance as a Connection to Community, Ancestors and the Past

6.1 Introduction

"You really should come and have fun at our Lisu wedding."

This is a phrase my Lisu friends often say to me when they know I am interested in music and dance. Indeed, a wedding, one of life's most significant rites, holds a unique place in the hearts of the Lisu people. For a community that thrives on singing and dancing, and revels in the joyous celebration of festivals and ceremonies, a wedding is more than just a ceremony. It's a grand stage, an ideal occasion that encapsulates their vibrant culture and spirit.

Since late November 2020, I was privileged to receive invitations to several such wedding festivities.[27] I realized how fortunate I was to have arrived in the Lisu region in October. Had I come during spring, summer, or autumn, I might not even have had the opportunity to witness even a single Lisu wedding. This is because Lisu weddings generally occur after the harvest season and before spring planting, that is, between late November and the end of February each year. During the non-winter seasons, Lisu people are usually busy with farming or work.

During the period from October 2020 to March 2021, I had the opportunity to attend seven full weddings. Among these, three were traditional style ceremonies, held in Louhai Village of Yongsheng County in Lijiang, Liguang Village of Yulong County in Lijiang, and Haibalo Village of Hutiao Xia in Diqing. Two weddings, held in Tongda Town of Huaping County and Songping Town of Yongsheng County in Lijiang, showcased a fusion of traditional and modern styles. The remaining two, primarily modern and Han Chinese style weddings, took place at an agritourism site on the outskirts of Lijiang City.[28]

[27] Unfortunately, due to factors such as limited time and local transportation conditions, I was unable to accept all these invitations. A traditional Lisu wedding lasts at least two days, and traveling to remote villages through mountainous roads can take a whole day each way. Thus, attending a wedding in another village requires roughly three days.

[28] Literally 农家乐 in Chinese. It is a popular concept in China where urban residents visit rural areas to experience agricultural life and enjoy the peaceful, natural environment. These rural getaways often provide accommodations, home-cooked meals made from local produce, and various recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, and fruit picking.

This chapter synthesizes the experiences of seven Lisu weddings. To provide a cohesive narrative, I have selected the most comprehensive and representative wedding as the primary narrative thread, using the others as supplementary examples to demonstrate the embodiment of music and dance in different stages of the wedding ceremonies. The insights garnered from the preceding chapters on Lisu songs, instruments, and dances find a resonant echo in this chapter. Building upon the foundational understanding established earlier, this chapter deepens the exploration of the role, function, and significance of music and dance not only in the everyday lives of the Lisu people but also in their festivals and ceremonial events.

Echoing Sugarman's approach, this chapter offers detailed descriptions of each step in a wedding, illustrating the diverse practices of singing, playing, and dancing, along with their social implications. Similar to how Sugarman emphasizes the role of music in shaping wedding discourses and its contribution to the community's societal and moral structure, and gender dynamics (Sugarman 1997), this chapter also explores how weddings serve as occasions to memorialize individuals, foregrounding community and continuity, and how music and dance link individual and collective memories to connect past and present (Shelemay 1998). Additionally, the pivotal role of musicians in weddings is also underscored, spotlighting their active and vital contributors to the success of these events. By selecting repertoires, maintaining energy on the dance floor, or making on-the-spot stylistic decisions, musicians facilitate emotional and sensory experiences for all attendees (Mason and Nimjee 2019). Furthermore, the narrative reflects on how, as in many other weddings, music and dance act not only as a celebratory force but also as a means to engage, showcase, and mediate the wedding process, involving interactions between guests and guests and hosts.

6.2 Prelude to the/a Lisu Wedding

6.2.1 Matchmaker

Li Jinsong is a well-known *nipa* throughout Songping Township, but he also holds another important role—that of a matchmaker. Recognizing his esteemed reputation and profound knowledge, villagers frequently invite him to act as a matchmaker for their children's weddings. Winter, one might say, is his busiest season. Not only does he continue his work as a *nipa*, but also traverses across different townships, weaving together the threads of destiny for young couples. In a Lisu wedding, the matchmaker plays a pivotal role. There is an old

Lisu saying, “No marriage without a matchmaker.” Regardless of the type of wedding, a skilled speaker such as an elder, father, brother, or *nipa* is typically needed to act as matchmaker. In some cases each family’s interests are represented by a matchmaker. Even in the Sinicized and Westernized Lisu weddings I have attended (and even if the couple’s relationship is a result of free love), there is still someone playing the role of matchmaker during the engagement ceremony and wedding. Before the wedding takes place, the matchmaker usually leads the groom’s side to the bride’s family to propose and discuss the related wedding matters. In Lisu culture, there are also cases where the bride’s side proposes to the groom’s side.

On 16 December 2020, I received a phone call from He Wenqin, the president of the Lijiang Lisu Culture Research Association: “Liu, my daughter is getting married soon. The day after tomorrow, we are going to her boyfriend’s home in Liguang Village, Liming Township, to propose marriage. Due to COVID-19 prevention policies, large-scale weddings are not allowed in the city, so we plan to hold a more traditional Lisu wedding in the village. I also successfully invited a highly respected *nipa*, Li Jinsong, to act as the matchmaker. I would like to invite you to join us, is that okay?” (Phone conversation with He Wenqin, Lijiang City, 16 December 2020). Without hesitation, I accepted her invitation. Despite having attended Lisu weddings many times, this was the only occasion where I had the chance to participate in the marriage customs and rituals from the initial proposal stage to the final wedding stage.

> Although my daughter is getting married, this time I’m not giving her away but rather welcoming my son-in-law, he will marry into our family and live with us. So, this time, it is the bride's side going to the groom’s house to propose (He Wenqin, personal communication, Lijiang City, 6 Januery 2021).

As she expressed, she was very reluctant to see her only daughter get married and leave home, so she chose a son-in-law who would live with them. On the way to the proposal, she expressed her immense gratitude for having found such an outstanding Lisu young man willing to join her family. Since He Wenqin had been dedicated to the research and preservation of Lisu culture in recent years, she wanted to take the opportunity to follow traditional Lisu wedding rituals at her daughter’s wedding. She also saw this as a chance to film and document the traditional Lisu wedding customs and to show me a complete and authentic representation of Lisu wedding traditions.

Like most young Lisu people today, A Fang and her partner had a freely chosen romantic relationship, but He Wenqin still invited an experienced matchmaker to make a formal marriage proposal. Li Jinsong was the perfect choice for this role. Having organized numerous Lisu weddings, he was familiar with the customs and every procedure involved. Furthermore, he was proficient in many ancient Lisu tunes, which were traditionally used in an antiphonal singing format during matchmaking. With his involvement in the matchmaking process, the proposals he handled were generally successful. Although this time the situation was unique because it involved the brides' family proposing to the groom's family, the matchmaker claimed that all the procedures were the same, just with the roles of the groom and bride reversed.

> Today, I have three main tasks. The first is to deliver the gifts we've prepared and explain our purpose to the man's family. If the man's family agrees to the marriage, the presents we've brought will be accepted. The second is to discuss with them matters related to the ceremony. The third is to work out an auspicious date for the wedding. (Li Jinsong, personal interview, Lijiang, 6 January 2021)

In the picture below (Figure 6.1), the matchmakers and family representatives from both the groom's and bride's side are engaging in a traditional Lisu singing exchange as part of the matchmaking process. He Wenqin, aimed to present a relatively complete traditional Lisu wedding custom, so both sides specially followed the old singing style as much as possible and sang for nearly three hours. In fact, it is not common for the singing to last that long nowadays. According to the Li Jinsong, there were instances in the past where such singing exchanges would last an entire day, but nowadays these probably last for just a few tens of minutes. In the excerpt below, the matchmaker from the groom's side sang about the groom's admirable qualities, aiming to convince the bride's side to agree to the marriage.

> His family has no evil ways,
> his family is honest.
>
> His family is harmonious,
> and everyone has a good temperament.
>
> They have many mountains and forests,
> it takes three days to circle the mountains,
> they can gather plenty of firewood.
>
> They have numerous cows and horses,
> They are strong and well-suited for ploughing fields,
> they can plod three hills in a single day.



Figure 6.1 Bride (right) and Groom (left)'s Families Participate in Song-based Matchmaking (The gentleman in the bride's family is the matchmaker Li Jinsong), 2021. Photo by Keyi Liu.

It is worth noting that, in every subsequent stage of the wedding ceremony, the matchmaker's role remains equally important. Their presence and participation in each stage of the wedding reflects the cultural values, customs, and beliefs surrounding marriage. Moreover, matchmakers often employ musical elements, such as singing or chanting, to facilitate communication thereby elevating the atmosphere of the entire celebration.

6.2.2 On the Way to Louhai Village, Yongsheng County, Lijiang

On 29 November 2020, I went with the famous Lisu singer Ashicai and driver Xu Ligang to the groom's home village of Louhai through a pretty valley banked by high mountains and hills, many still forested. I lost track of how many hills and curves we travelled across during the five hours' drive, and just as I was about to fall asleep, Xu Ligang told me we were almost there.

> We just crossed this mountain with 32 turns. Gosh, how do you feel, you've never seen anything like it before, right? [He said this with some glee.] The road here before was a dirt road dug by the villagers themselves, and it was a concrete road funded by the government in recent years under the Poverty Alleviation Policy. This enables more Lisu people to get the chance to walk out of the mountains to the cities. (Xu Ligang, personal communication, Louhai Village, 29 November 2020)

As he said, the roads were winding and circuitous, but the upside was that most of them were made of concrete. I could imagine that in the past, travelling on bumpy dirt roads would have

certainly taken much longer. Each village or town's name was marked in a large carved stone monument at the fork of the main route.

On the way, Ashicai introduced me to the groom of this wedding – Shi Yanxiong. He an avid music lover and founder of the band "Longma Group", which he created with Cai Yuping in 2017. Two years ago, they were Ashicai's apprentices, learning about singing and acting from him. "I'm delighted that one of my students is getting married today! I felt obligated to come here and congratulate them in person, even if it's a long distance away and I'm not going to charge him for this gig," he exclaimed cheerfully.

6.3 The Day Before the Wedding

6.3.1 "Helping Day"

Nestled in the heart of the majestic mountain range at an altitude of approximately 3,000 meters, the picturesque Louhai village offers a unique glimpse into an age-old way of life. Upon gazing across the landscape, dozens of traditional Lisu wooden houses are scattered on the slopes, seamlessly blending with the surrounding natural environment and reflecting the architectural style of the Lisu community. The thin, invigorating air carries a crisp chill, playfully hinting at the challenges of high altitude, and permeated with the faint yet distinct fragrances of medicinal herbs carefully cultivated by the villagers.

Villagers greeted Ashicai joyfully all the way from the village entrance to the groom's house. It was already 2 in the afternoon when we arrived at the groom's house after our long journey, and the entire courtyard was crowded, bustling and lively, with the sounds of guests conversing, toasting, and eating, and with people busily serving food and clearing tables. Approximately 10 tables were set up throughout the courtyard for guests to have lunch, each table seating about eight people. Red ribbons and balloons were draped around the courtyard, revealing a scene full of wedding atmosphere and happiness (Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2 Wedding Banquet in Louhai village, Guanghua downtown, Yongsheng County, 2020. Photo by Keyi Liu.

During the banquet, I met the lovely bride and the handsome groom, as well as another band member, Cai Yuping. Upon realizing why I was there after a brief introduction, Cai was delighted. He enthusiastically introduced me to stories about him and groom, as well as some circumstances of the village. Both he and the groom, Shi Yanxiong, were both 19 years old, an age at which the male in the village were already planning their weddings. Seeing his dear friend getting married filled Cai with joy and a sense of admiration. “I am aiming to find a beloved person and get married before next year,” he added excitedly.

The two young men had not received formal or systematic music education, but they had grown up in the same Lisu village, singing and dancing, and had fallen in love with their own culture and music. Given the poor educational conditions in their hamlet, they gave up the chance to attend high school in pursuit of their musical dreams in cities, leaving the village three years ago.

> I could not speak Chinese fluently when I first went to the city, and I was afraid to talk to people from other ethnic groups. Fortunately, we met Ashicai and followed him to various Lisu areas to perform. Surprisingly, I discovered that there were lot of Lisu people in various locations apart from Yongsheng, and we could communicate with each other regardless of where they came from.” (Cai Yuping, personal communication, Louhai Village, 29 November 2020)

Cai Yuping showed me around after lunch. According to him, Lisu people from the same village come to the groom’s or bride’s house on the first day of the wedding to assist in preparing the meal for the bridal feast. The local Lisu people don’t seem to have a specific

name for this day, it is generally just called the first day of the wedding, although there are some scholars who refer to it as the *Xiangbangri* (helping day). I saw a big, open-air, improvised kitchen at the rear of the courtyard where we were chatting, with a dozen large pots and pans in which various types of meat were being stewed with a gurgling sound. Some of the villagers who came to assist were cleaning dishes or washing and cutting vegetables, while others were in charge of lugging firewood, lighting fires, and cooking, and had already begun preparations for dinner and for the next day's feast. Due to the large number of guests, the courtyard was packed all day. Once each set of guests completed their meals, the tables were swiftly cleared and reset for the next group of diners. This rapid turnover was necessitated by the limited number of tables available in the courtyard, which were insufficient for the large number of guests. Consequently, the banquet typically cycled through 4-5 rounds of seating to ensure that all guests were served. Meanwhile, many children ran around the courtyard, which seemed like an ideal playground for them, as the adults were too busy to supervise their activities.

Although the entire scene appeared somewhat chaotic at first glance, a closer examination revealed that everything was arranged sensibly and in an orderly manner. None of this would have been possible without the assistance of a middle-aged man in the courtyard, who was skilfully orchestrating everyone's movements. He was the groom's uncle and also the matchmaker for this wedding. As matchmaker, Uncle Shi was likely the busiest and most hardworking person at the event. This was not only due to the intricacy of the traditional Lisu wedding ceremony, but also because the parents entrusted him with all significant matters, and the groom had to follow his guidance throughout the three-day celebration.

One of Uncle Shi's immediate tasks was to prepare betrothal gifts for the groom's family to take with them when they collect the bride the next day. Records of the bride price for Lisu marriages can be traced back as far as the description of the Lisu people in Weixi region in the Qing Dynasty "the Lisu … married with cows as a bride price" (Yu 1769). The Lisu bride's dowry has grown progressively richer and more diversified as living conditions have increased. But "in comparison to other ethnic groups, the bride's dowry for our Lisu people is still comparatively low and casual. Neither party is concerned about the price of the bride," said the matchmaker. "We usually carry alcohol, tea, cigarettes, and sugar. These are the most indispensable things in Lisu life. Pig tails are also brought in return for a gift from bride's family. Well-off families will bring several cows and pigs. There are also other kinds

of nourishment, grains, and oil available nowadays." Some Lisu prepare various other gifts, such as two pork legs: the front leg carried by the person walking in front and the back leg carried by the one walking behind. According to local Lisu people, living conditions were not as good twenty years ago as they are now. It was customary to slaughter a pig and cut it in half, keeping half for guests and the other half for the betrothal gift. According to Yu Yanjun, the Lisu people of Dechang have some differences in their customs in relation to the bride's dowry. They do not employ a matchmaker to arrange a marriage for the groom or bride and they are unconcerned about how grand the gift is. They normally let the groom's parents or older brothers negotiate visiting the bride's home three times to discuss wedding matters (Yu 2018:16).

As Cai Yuping was introducing Uncle Shi to me, we were led to one of the dining tables in the courtyard for our meal. Yes, you heard that right, I was about to eat dinner less than two hours after finishing lunch. Since we arrived late, I caught the tail end of lunch, and because I needed to observe and participate in some music activities, Uncle Shi scheduled me for the first round of dinner. The warm-hearted Lisu people did not want me to miss any meal at the banquet. Their hospitality was so overwhelming that I felt my movements and thoughts slowing down noticeably after dinner. I hoped this would not affect my work later. During the dinner, Cai mentioned that the guests in the courtyard for the dinner banquet today were mostly locals from this village, particularly those who had come to help today. This was the day before the official wedding, and it was all about getting ready for the following big day. As the process of traditional Lisu wedding requires a great deal of time and planning, and complex etiquette, many locals had voluntarily gathered at the groom's house from very early in the morning to assist with the preparations.

6.3.2 Feasting and Dancing

As dusk fell after dinner, the lights in the courtyard began to twinkle one by one. The young women, one after another, changed into their dazzling Lisu costumes (Figure 6.3). Ashicai and another musician started to play the *maniu*. The guests clasped hands and danced in a large circle around the courtyard, neatly following the *maniu* music. As more guests joined the circle, it got larger and larger until it could no longer fit in the entire yard. Then, it was divided into two circles. Typically, two *maniu* players are invited to a wedding because playing the *maniu* requires a high level of lung capacity, and it is challenging to play and dance at the same time for a long duration. The two players could take turns playing to

prevent a break in the music, which could dampen everyone's spirits. It is worth mentioning that Ashicai is from Yulong County where the *maniu* tunes and dance steps were quite different from here, except for some famous Lisu dance tunes. I was a bit worried about how the local villagers would react to unfamiliar music and dance steps. In the end, I found out that I was the one who needed to worry. The new music brought by Ashicai seemed to enliven the atmosphere even more. Although some people initially struggled to keep up, most of them, after watching Ashicai's steps and dancing for less than a round, got the hang of it. Even children aged seven or eight learned faster than I did.



Figure 6.3 Dancing on the wedding with maniu music in the Louhai village, Guanghua town, 2020. Photo by Keyi Liu.

Now everyone was having fun.

They kept inviting me to join in the dancing. Perhaps it was due to the high altitude of Louhai Village, as after dancing a few rounds, I started to feel out of breath and had to take a break. The groom's sister noticed and took me to her room.

> **KEYI**: "Ah, because of your brother's wedding, your room has been turned into a resting area for everyone," I said apologetically, as I saw a few guests in the room snacking and resting, including Cai Yuping's sister-in-law.

GROOM'S SISTER: "Oh, it's no problem at all. Would you like to try on my Lisu attire? I think it would look great on you!"

GROOM'S SISTER-IN-LAW: "Absolutely, you should give it a try. Our Lisu clothing is different from other areas. It's brightly coloured and very beautiful. That is why we are known as the 'Flower Lisu'" (Hua Lisu).

KEYI: "May I? It looks precious." I was worried about getting it dirty and I was not sure how to wear it as it seemed to be made up of many pieces.

GROOM'S SISTER: "Don't worry. It's not that expensive. Only the belt is handmade, the rest is made using modern industrial techniques. If it were all handmade, then yes, it would indeed be quite valuable!"

KEYI: "Thank you! I would love to try it on. By the way, how much does the belt cost?" I started getting dressed as I spoke.

GROOM'S SISTER: "It is around 1000 RMB. Did you notice the outfit my mother was wearing? That one is entirely handmade. Can you guess how much it costs?"

KEYI: "I'm not sure, but I would guess that costume is about 8000 RMB?"

GROOM'S SISTER: "If we were to sell it, it would be worth at least 20,000 RMB. But these are usually made for personal or family use, not to sell, as they take a long time to make. My mum made one for me as well and she may give it to me when I get married." She began to giggle.

KEYI: "That sounds fantastic! Is this a custom in Lisu? I mean, does a mother usually make a Lisu costume for her daughter as her wedding dress?"

GROOM'S SISTER: "I'm not sure about other places, but that's how we do it in our Hua Lisu community." She glanced at the others in the room.

GROOM'S SISTER-IN-LAW: "Typically, a mother will hand make a traditional Lisu costume for her daughter. It takes a long time to make such a set, perhaps a year or more. The process of making clothes is complex, requiring hemp to be planted first, and then stripped, boiled, twisted, spun, washed and wound before weaving. Some of them even need to be dyed.… By the way, if you're interested, my mother-in-law can sing several weaving songs. If so, I would like to take you to her after the wedding as she's probably busy seeing her friends right now." I guess Cai Yuping probably had already told her about my interest in Lisu music culture. At that moment I feel so privileged to have met these hospitable Lisu people.

With their help, I managed to get fully dressed in the Lisu costume, which consisted of about six pieces (Figure 6.4). Everyone seemed delighted to see me in Lisu costume.

GROOM'S SISTER-IN-LAW: "You look like a true Lisu girl now, but you might need to get a bit more sun and tan."

(Group conversation with Cai Yuping's sister and sister-in-law, Louhai Village, 29 November 2020)



Figure 6.4 Groom's sister (right) and author (left) in Lisu costume, 2020. Photo by Cai Yuping.

They drew me into the dancing circle again and joyfully taught me the steps and how to dance without getting exhausted. In fact, the challenge for me was that the footwork for some tunes was difficult to decipher. I could easily find the pattern for tunes in 4/4 or 4/5 time, but for those in 7/4 and 9/4, I felt somewhat overwhelmed. As mentioned in Chapter 3, as the rhythm becomes more complex, the footwork patterns also become more challenging. For some tunes, I was unable to master the steps even by the end of the tune, which typically lasts for 4-5 rounds. Besides, another issue came up at that time: the hat on my head was getting heavier and tighter. I observed the girls surrounding me and noticed that they appeared to be incredibly relaxed, as if they did not even need a break. According to them "we can dance for three or four hours without getting tired and we usually dance like this every night for the three days of the wedding" (groom's younger sister, personal communication, Louhai Village, 29 November 2020).

It was almost 12:00 am when I followed Yunping's sister-in-law home to bed as I had to get up early the next day for *welcoming the bride ritual*. The group had no intention of stopping

the dance when I left. In my dreams, it seemed I was still dancing to the distant sounds of the *maniu*.

6.4 Welcoming the Bride Day

The following morning, as the quiet mountain village stirred to life, we awoke at 7:00 a.m. and went to the groom's residence for breakfast. The gentle chirping of birds and the crisp, fresh air added to the serene ambiance of the early morning in the village. The quantity and variety of food were almost as abundant as lunch and dinner. Perhaps because my stomach was not accustomed to consuming to so much meat early in the morning, I mainly ate some vegetables before joining the procession to fetch the bride. The second day was the most important and central part of the wedding. It included the reception, picking up the bride, wedding banquet, invitations to worship, and the naming of the new couple. I noticed that the groom's entourage consisted mostly of middle-aged and elderly people, with young people conspicuously absent. Curious, I asked, "Where are all the young people?" "They are still sleeping," Yunping's brother replied with a chuckle, "They were drinking and dancing until 4 or 5 in the morning. It would be a miracle if they could get up now, ha-ha!"

6.4.1 Ancestor Worship

On this day of the wedding, the first ceremony to be held was the ancestral worship ritual. In addition to the matchmaker (Uncle Shi), there was another deputy matchmaker today. The two matchmakers clasped their hands in fists and knelt in the main room of the groom's residence facing the southern wall directly opposite the entrance. Following their lead, the groom and his best man soon assumed the same position. They proceeded to worship to the stark white wall on the eastern side of the room, an act that appeared deeply symbolic, before making their way outdoors to bow in the direction of the nearby mountain. What was the significance of these gestures? Who was the recipient of such devout worship? These questions shirled around in my head, prompting me seek out the groom's uncle, hoping he could illuminate the underlying meanings of these rituals. He willingly complied, offering an explanation:

> Typically, the first time we pay homage is to the ancestors of the groom's family by burning incense. The second time, we pay respect to the direct senior relatives of the groom. If the

> parents have passed away, we pay respect to them. If the parents are still alive, we pay respect to their parents, which is the previous generation. The final step we take outside is to pray for the blessings of the mountain deities and bodhisattvas to ensure the smooth success of this marriage. These traditions have been passed down from generation to generation. (Li Jinsong, personal conversation, Louhai Village, 30 November 2020)

As they knelt and paid their respects, a *maniu* musician played a tune off to the side. According to the musician, the tune he played was called "Respecting the Mountain God." The Lisu people live in the mountains, and everything they have is dependent upon these grand hills. The tune is a form of gratitude and praise for the mountains that provide for their livelihoods.

This important rite signifies the connection between the marrying couple and their ancestors, as well as seeking their blessings for the groom to successfully receive the bride. The matchmaker, the groom, and their families pay their respects to the spirits of their forebears and express gratitude for the wisdom and guidance passed down through generations. It was a solemn and meaningful moment that set the tone for the rest of the wedding festivities.

6.4.2 Setting Out for the Bride's Home

Subsequently, the procession set off to welcome the bride, bearing gifts that had meticulously been prepared the previous day. The Lisu have certain cherished customs for the procession. For example, two matchmakers are positioned at the head and tail of the welcoming entourage, with the remainder of the party situated in between. The bride they were going to welcome this time resided about 3km from the groom's house. It should be nothing that the bride was not a resident of Guanghua Village; her homeland was in Honghe, which was over 300 kilometres away. Due to this significant distance, she and her parents had arranged to stay at the groom's house in advance. Yet, in accordance with Lisu tradition, a ceremonial reception of the bride is still deemed necessary. Therefore, the bride's family spent the previous night at another relative's home, anticipating their collection by the groom come morning. In contrast, the other two weddings I attended featured brides from neighbouring villages. As such, the groom would typically depart the previous afternoon to greet the bride, stay overnight at her residence, and then return with her the following morning.

The journey was replete with excitement as folk songs filled the air, the notes of the *maniu* resonated, and firecrackers popped, their echoes seeming to announce the joyous event to the entire village:

> Sun and moon pair with mountains and rivers,
> fish and shrimp belong in the river.
> In the forest, the beasts pair,
> with the birds pairing in the trees.
> Grass pairs with insects,
> insects pair with butterflies.
> The clear breeze pairs with the bright moon,
> flowers and grass pair with trees.
> Without a dowry, a wedding cannot be,
> without a matchmaker, a pairing cannot be.
>
> … …

After an hour of walking, the group arrived at the bride's house. As soon as we arrived, the bride's family picked up slices of boiled pork liver with chopsticks and placed them individually into the mouth of each member of the groom's family. In their belief, pork liver represents the best part of the pig, therefore they generously offer it to their guests as a testament to their hospitality. I was no exception, receiving this warm and enthusiastic treatment. The pork liver was delicious, though it likely left my mouth gleaming with oil. Upon seeing our mouths glistening with oil, the bride's family appeared quite pleased, their smiles broadening even further. Only the musician was fortunate enough to avoid this experience, as he was busying playing the "wedding procession tune" on his *maniu*.

We were invited to enter a chamber where the bride's family served us tea. I noticed the simplicity of the room, which was void of any decor and lacked even basic furniture, although the floor was strewn with pine leaves. I found this somewhat perplexing – why host guests in such a modest setting, especially on such a significant day, and what did the pine leaves signify? Furthermore, where were the bride and her parents? Where did they all go? Was the bride unwilling to marry the groom? I couldn't help but let my imagination run free, as I inquired about to Yuping about the bride's whereabouts. He explained:

> A Lisu bride's family has always entertained the groom's family in a room like this, without decoration. Because they need to burn incense and worship in this room which has to accommodate 20 or 30 people simultaneously, and each family should sit separately on its own side. Therefore, an empty room is the best option. (Cai Yuping, personal communication, Louhai Village, 30 November 2020)

He added they did not know where the bride was now either, but that the bride's parents would turn up when we got the bride back. We would have to go to the mountain to look for the bride. Why was the bride in the mountains and what was she doing there? Unfortunately, I did not have time to figure out these new questions as the matchmaker had picked up a bowl of wine in each hand and started to sing the *picking up the bride song*:

> Pork doesn't even make a sound when you put it in the pan and fry it.
> When you put a piece of pork in your mouth it doesn't even have any oil. Please excuse me.
>
> The bride's uncle also took two bowls of wine and sang:
>
> Our girl cannot embroider.
> Your lapels are wide and long.
> Please teach her slowly and treat her well in the future.
>
> ……

After finishing the song, they sprinkled the wine onto a temporary altar. These lyrics demonstrated that the Lisu people are quite humble, expressing themselves through self-deprecation and metaphor. The matchmaker's metaphor of "the pork without oil" indicates that the gifts they had provided were limited and that they hoped the bride's family would not mind or resent them. Lisu girls typically possess talents in dressmaking and embroidery. However, the bride's uncle modestly stated that their girl was incapable of doing anything, implying that she had been pampered within her family. He then used the metaphor of "your lapels are wide and long" to represent the groom's family's financial generosity, expressing his hope that they would treat the bride well in the future.

Before leaving for looking the bride, the matchmaker and deputy matchmaker, the groom, and bridesmaids need to worship the ancestors of the bride's family and the mountain gods once again, just as they did at the groom's home previously. Following that, the groom and best man stayed at the bride's house waiting for news. The matchmaker guided the other bride's family to the mountains seeking the bride. "My brothers who have conducted the rite, let us all go up the hill and get the bride back," he sang. To convey their thanks, the groom and best man kneeled in front of the group. Meanwhile, the *maniu* music has remained constant throughout the entire process. On the way to find the bride, Ashicai told me that the bride's parents are not permitted to meet the groom's family before they get bride back according to Lisu wedding custom. Everything had been taken care of by the bride's uncle.

The bride and her bridesmaids had hidden away in the mountains well before daybreak to show their shyness.

6.4.3 Looking for the Bride

In such an expansive mountainous area, where could one possibly find the bride? Fortunately, my companions had attended many weddings and they were familiar with the customary hiding spots for brides amid these mountains. Glancing around, I saw several locations on the mountain where girls in Lisu bridal attire could be seen. The lead matchmaker suggested we venture uphill, while the deputy matchmaker recommended exploring further down, saying those above were too obvious and likely to be decoys. Some of these girls were bridesmaids who had cleverly disguised themselves as the bride, hiding in different places to confuse the matchmakers and the groom's team. Upon reaching the foot of the mountain, we discovered that it wasn't the bride we had found, but rather a bridesmaid playing the part. Since the deputy matchmaker had been led astray, the bridesmaids inflicted a punishment upon him – he was to partake in several rounds of drinks before the group could resume the search elsewhere. The deputy matchmaker consequently downed several cups of alcohol to secure our release.

Ashicai said that in the past, only the bride and her bridesmaid hid in the mountains. Later, for reasons of safety and to make the wedding more exciting and challenging, the number of bridesmaids hiding in the mountains had increased. However, in some areas, the ritual has become increasingly simplified, and the bride sometimes hides in her own courtyard instead.

As the deputy matchmaker drank, the bridesmaids seemed somewhat embarrassed and provided some clues as to the bride's whereabouts. However, when we arrived at the location they described we realized we had once again reached the wrong place. This misadventure occurred four times before we eventually made it to the other side of the hill, where we were halted by another bridesmaid. Several "brides" were sat on the ground dressed in bridal attire, their heads covered by large bridal hats, faces hidden from view. The young women declared that the matchmaker could only take the bride with him if he successfully identified her amongst the group. Seeing that the matchmaker's predicament, the groom's sister-in-law stepped in to help him in discerning the real bride. She said, "I notice that girl differs from the

others; her belt is distinct, featuring a large red design." Finally, the true bride was found, and mark this joyous occasion, the musician played the *maniu* once again.

As I marvelled at the difficulties we faced along the way to find the bride, the matchmaker mentioned that in the past, this part of the process was even more complicated in somewhere. After finding the bride, the newlyweds could not go home immediately and would spend several days in the mountains. This custom was also observed and recorded by Prince Henri d'Orléans when he visited Lotsolo of Salween valley in 1895:

> The wedding feast over, at nightfall the betrothed retires with her parents into the mountain, and the swain has to seek them, which quest successfully achieved, the parents withdraw, and the newly-wedded couple remain till morning upon the hillside when they return to their homes. They have to repeat this ceremony for three nights before they may settle down. This custom naturally precludes any marriages during the rains. They admitted in confidence that the bridegroom was generally in the secret as to the direction in which he might find his party (1898:164-5).

I tried asking another matchmaker Li Jinsong if there used to be such a tradition in his village. The matchmaker explained: "We do have that tradition here, but it is now rare to see such a practice. The main reason is that the mountains are home to many wild animals, making it unsafe. Moreover, living conditions have improved nowadays, unlike in the past when there was no separate space for newlyweds. Due to their shyness, couples would stay in the mountains" (Li Jinsong, personal communication, Songping Township, 6 January 2021).

After finding the bride, we returned to her house to rest for a while. That is when the bride's parents finally showed up. Just when I thought we could finally escort the bride back to the groom's house, the bride's family stopped the procession at the door and began singing a song claiming the groom was taking the wrong path:

MATCHMAKER: We arrived at your house on time,
without any delays or missteps.
BRIDE'S UNCLE: You claim to have chosen the correct path,
I believe you took the incorrect way today to get to our house.
M: We're not going in the wrong direction,
I believe it's because you don't want to marry her off,
and want to keep her to watching the cattle and sheep.
B: You must be going the wrong way,

You can't get to our house unless you walk for three days.
You went the wrong way.

In this part, the bride's uncle repeatedly emphasized throughout the song that the groom's family "had taken the wrong path." In fact, this metaphor symbolizes the bride's family's reluctance to part with the bride and their unwillingness to let the matchmaker take her away easily. Typically, before the bride is escorted away, there is a ritual like this to express the family's attachment to the bride and to test the matchmaker's ability to take her away until he can persuade the bride's family through a song duel. This part of the ceremony can sometimes last for several minutes or even longer, and I have only included a small portion of the lyrics here. This lively approach where both parties engage in a playful battle of wits through song enriched the wedding ceremony.

6.4.4 Naming the New Couple

The *maniu* player began to play the *welcoming the bride tune* as the procession approached the groom's house. The group entered the courtyard of the groom's house hand in hand and began dancing in a circle to the music. The procession danced clockwise for six full laps, indicating that good fortune had arrived. Then, the matchmaker started to work on the new names he would give to the newlyweds. The room had been set up with all of the necessary items for the ceremony (Figure 6.5). The new name session was hosted by the matchmaker and the bride's uncle (Figure 6.6).



Figure 6.5 Items needed for the new name-giving ceremony, 2020. Photo by Keyi Liu.



Figure 6.6 Bride's uncle (left) and matchmaker (centre) pour wine as part of the new name ritual, 2020. Photo by Keyi Liu.

The matchmaker picked up two bowls of wine and sang *naming the new couple song*:

> Grandparents,
> uncles, aunts and uncles,
> brothers and sisters,
> brothers and sisters,
> nephews and nieces,
> grandchildren and grandchildren,
> now we all wish that the new names of the bride and groom will be Youyi pa and Youyi ma.
> We wish them good fortune and prosperity and happiness!

The song lasted for roughly seven minutes, and only a small part of its last verse is included here. As shown in Figure 6.6, while the matchmaker was singing, the two men poured the wine from their bowls into the fire once every section, and the work was not considered complete until they had done this three times. This symbolizes the blessing that the bride and groom will receive. According to the matchmaker, this new name is often carried over into the couple's children's names, meaning in this case that this couple's first child would very likely be named Shi Youyi.

As this shows, Lisu people are named twice in their lives, first at birth and second at marriage or engagement. The rules of naming have changed to varying degrees over the years and are not clearly explained by most Lisu people themselves now, and in some cases such as in Wadi, Nujiang River have even been lost (Lu 2013:41).

Reflecting on this, the matchmaker said to me, "Although the Lisu have their own language, they do not have their own script. Very few young people know these seemingly simple

songs anymore. I wonder if the couple's children will still experience such scenes when they get married." Once the bride was successfully escorted home, the matchmaker's job was essentially done, although later, during the feast,. the groom's family would express their gratitude to the matchmaker with material tokens of appreciation and by toasting with alcohol where, in a display of respect, they would drink as much as possible.

6.4.5 Three Spaces in the Wedding Feast

In the winter, it gets dark fairly early. When an event is taking place, everyone changes into their colourful Lisu clothes around 4:00pm. The supper was served in three separate spaces, each occupied by a different type of guest. The whole courtyard comprised one space, which is normally reserved for guests who came from other villages, such as myself. The second space is the living room, which is set aside for the bride and groom's female relatives. The third was usually the main room of the house, and was reserved for the men of the bride and groom's families.

In the courtyard, dinner is once again served in turn to accommodate all the guess. At this moment, the groom's relatives came to call us to eat first: "Liu, come here and have dinner first so that you can go and listen to the singing when it starts." I appreciated how kind they were and how supportive they were of my work.

Throughout the meal, members of the groom's family carry rice and dishes, and will attempt to add rice and meat to the guests' bowls to show their appreciation and hospitality. Whenever there was food on the table that was almost finished, they would come over with pots to add more food.

> **ASHICAI**: "Liu, you are too thin well, please do not lose weight. A little plumpness suits a girl well." Ashicai looks at me with a concerned expression.
>
> **ONE OF THE GUESTS AT THE SAME TABLE**: "Absolutely, don't hold back. Add some more meat to your plate, you haven't eaten much."
>
> **XU LIGANG**: "You really should eat a bit more meat here, otherwise the altitude is too high, and the physical exertion is too much for you to bear."
>
> **ASHICAI**: "In the past we only got to eat such fatty meat at New Year's Eve. The boys could eat several pieces of meat in one meal. But now that we are living in better conditions and know the importance of eating healthy, I guess we can't eat that much anymore." He nodded, taking the initiative to add meat to my rice bowl.

As I was thinking about how to politely refuse fatty white meats, a man sitting across from me seemed to read my mind. “How about this,” he proposed, “If you eat the two pieces of the meat in your bowl, I will take care of the rest.” To be honest, what he said sounded very familiar to me. Oh, isn’t that how they normally encourage me to drink? But I supposed I am still lucky: I overhear them talking about a Lisu custom from Dechang region, where the host would quickly take a large piece of fatty meat with chopsticks and forcefully stuffs it into the mouth of an unsuspecting guest.

After dinner, Cai Yuping led me to the second area of the banquet, where the bride and groom’s female relatives are dining. 16 people sat in a large circle on a pine-leaf strewn floor, which I had by now learnt was a symbol of pleasure and good fortune. There was a generous spread of food in the centre. This room was filled with the sound of laughter and singing.

MOTHER: My adored little daughter,
My darling child,
I’m so hesitant to marry you off,
I don’t want to send you away.
……
The family must be harmonious,
Be loving to your husband.
Be kind to your family,
Be friendly to your neighbours.
Ask your mother-in-law where to go,
Tell your husband where you are going. [29]

SISTER-IN-LAW: My little sister and I are like a pair of bamboo chopsticks,
My sister and I are like a pair of Jew’s Harps.
At night we are friends looking for vegetables,
In the morning, we are partners in fetching water.
Since I came into this family,
When I entered this house.
Though my mother-in-law teaches me,
I depend on my little sister for many things.

[29] This is a metaphor. It does not mean the wife should exactly ask her mother-in-law where she is going or tell her husband where she is going. It means the wife needs to show respect, listen, and be kind to her husband’s family.

Although my father-in-law teaches me,
I depend on my little sister for many things.
You help me with my livestock at night,
You help me feeding the chicks in the morning.
From now on,
I'll be the only one looking for vegetables.
From now on,
I'll be the only one to fetch water.

On this day's banquet, the bride and the groom's female relatives get together to drink wine and sing song that send off the girl who is being married. The mother's lyrics not only expresses her reluctance to send her daughter away but also provide the bride instruction on how to behave when she marries into her husband's family. Female friends and sisters of the same generation, who grew up together as children, mainly reminisce about the years they spent together and express their feelings for each other.

There are no fixed rules for the length or content of this kind of song. My hosts said that when a singer is good at expressing herself or has a deep relationship with the bride, the song will be very moving and tearful. The bride's sister added that if the bride had offended her relatives or had a tense relationship with them, some of her sisters or sisters-in-law would seize the chance to criticize her. Fortunately, this latter did not occur at this wedding.

The third area, that reserved for the men of the bride and groom's families, was similar to the female relatives' room, except that it was larger, more crowded, and had a more serious atmosphere. Typically, this room is occupied by men only. But Cai Yuping thought it would be wonderful to document and research these Lisu traditional songs, so he explained my intentions to the group, and they graciously allowed me to stand at the doorway to observe them as they chanted traditional tunes, savouring their homemade sorghum wine between verses. The singers representing the groom's family and the bride's family were engaged in a harmonious duel of antiphonal singing. Sometimes, representative singers from each side sung alone, sometimes each side chose a leader, with others singing along. According to them, they planned to sing till midnight. This practice is simplified in comparison to the old custom of singing for three consecutive days and night. The wedding songs' melody is simple and repetitive, usually only 2 to 4 lines. The songs typically employ traditional tunes with impromptu lyrics (more details can be found in Chapter 2). The captivating and clever lyrics held everyone in the room spellbound, making them reluctant to leave.

As for the content of lyrics, the men, as usual at such events, began with the legend of the beginning of the world, and the appearance of the first Lisu people, and then they sang about difficulty of raising a child or shared unforgettable stories about the bride and groom as they grew up. And then, the bride and groom became the primary subjects of the songs, from the introduction of the matchmaker prior to their marriage, to both sets of parents' agreement, the preparations for the marriage, the ceremony, and the couple's blessing. While wishing the bride and groom a happy and successful life together, a healthy harvest, and a prosperous family, the singing reminds those listening not to forget their history and ancestral rites. Cai Yuping told me that the Lisu lyrics are full of poetry, and that ancient tunes like these are frequently sung with a significant number of archaic phrases and metaphors. He and other youngsters can only grasp of half of what is being sung. Therefore, the lead singer of each of the two parties is generally the most knowledgeable and wise man. The lyrics seemed so fascinating and intelligent that they seized the attention of everyone in the room and made them reluctant to leave. Here is a selection about the hardships of raising children**:**

Groom's representative: Take care of your baby so that he does not cry at night,
Take care of your baby so that she doesn't get cold in the morning.
Carry he to the village to pray for blessings,
To the village to show off.
Carry him until he is three months old,
He grows to four months…

Bride's representative: Teach her to do needlework at night,
Teach her to do productive work in the morning.
People are born to work,
We are born to live.

6.4.6 Dancing Time Again!

In the courtyard, just as the previous night, the bride and groom were hosting their guests. The guests had formed a circle, dancing to the rhythm of the *maniu*. In all the weddings I attended, whether in the countryside or in the city, dancing around the bonfire in the evening is a must-do activity. Typically, a *maniu* musician is invited to entertain the audience. When musician takes a break, a sound system is used to play dance music and songs, such as Ashicai's "Zi La Lei*"* (Figure 6.7), "The Lisu Village Welcomes You, and Dancing in the Three Rivers." These songs are typically in simple metres, like the 2/4 beat in "Zi La Lei*"*. In words of Cai Yuping, "The footwork of electronic dance music is rather basic. The *maniu* could play more amazing and varied tunes, and it would be more enjoyable to dance to." As

that suggests, for some people, more complex dance steps and rhythms can provide a more engaging and satisfying experience, especially for those who are skilled dancers or who enjoy the challenge and artistry of more complex dances (see further Chapter 4). The *maniu* player monitors the participants to see how many people are dancing and which kind of dances to keep playing.



Figure 6.7 Transcription of the song "Zi La Lei". Transcribed by Keyi Liu.

As Louhai village is relatively large and Ashicai is an outstanding musician, this wedding seemed extraordinarily lively. But not every Lisu wedding was so magnificent and spectacular. I attended a wedding in a small village named Haba Luo which is located at the foot of Haba snow mountain (Figure 6.8). (*Haba* means moon in Lisu and *luo* means valley.) The ceremony in the daytime was similar to that in Louhai, but most of guests went home or drank indoors after dancing at about 11.00 p.m. due to the low temperature in the snow mountain area. Only a few youngsters remained in the courtyard, and they sang sitting in a circle around the campfire. One of the young men played guitar and while another played djembe drums. Sometimes boys spontaneously came up with romantic or suggestive verses, but the girls preferred to respond with a cool aloofness and indifference. For example:

Boy: The moon, so full, it gleams in the sky,
Inside it, a girl I spy.
When I walk, the moon follows my stride,
With the moon by my side, joy I can't hide.

Girl: I am not the moon, nor do I gleam,
The round and glowing one you sing of, could it be the sun?
My days are joyful, my heart is light,
I sleep soundly, as the night winds take flight.

As is the case everywhere, Lisu boys enjoy making girls blush or fume. Singing and music are favoured activities—the main courting tools. If a girl walks by, they might substitute her name for the inevitable "darling" or "you" in the song.



Figure 6.8 The wedding in a small village of Haba Luo village, Hutiaoxia township, 2020. Photo by Keyi Liu.

6.5 Back to the Bride's Home Day

On the third day of the wedding, it is customary for the groom to accompany the bride back to her family home**.** The purpose of this tradition is for the groom to pay respect to his in-laws and show gratitude for raising his new wife. During this visit, the groom's family will usually bring gifts such as fruits, pastries, or liquor to present to the bride's family. The couple will also spend time with the bride's family, catching up and enjoying a meal together. After the visit, the couple will return to the groom's family home, marking the end of the Lisu wedding ceremony and the beginning of their new life together.

On this day, the guests returned to their own homes. Ashicai, Xue Ligang, and I also made our way back to Lijiang city. Though it only lasted a short two or three days, when the lively and fulfilling wedding festivities suddenly returned to calmness, one could not help but feel a sense of loss and not wating to leave. It seemed as though Ashicai could sense my thoughts; he said "in the past, communication was limited, males were typically bold enough to invite the girl of their dreams to dance and sing with them when they encountered her during festivals or wedding banquets. If you do not take the opportunity, you will not know when you will see each other again and may therefore miss the chance of a lifetime." At that moment, Xu Ligang joked, "Liu, look, Ashicai must be thinking about a girl he met and still thinks about." Ashicai didn't offer any more details, instead singing:

My sweetheart.
My sweetheart.
I consider myself fortunate to have met you in my life.
Your flower-like face has left an indelible mark on my heart.
However, I have no idea when we will meet again.

The winding mountain road had felt like a never-ending journey when we travelled to Louhai. Yet, the return trip held a different sentiment. It felt shorter, the miles breezing by as laughter and conversation filled the air. This transformation was largely due to Xu Ligang, a typical humorous Lisu man. He held the uncanny ability to turn every situation into a wellspring of laughter. For example, when we encountered a traffic jam, Xu would quip, "No need to be worried, I conveniently have a tent in the car. If we cannot get back, the three of us can camp by the side of the road overnight. I even have 40 pounds of potatoes in the trunk; I can roast them for you to eat. Hey, why don't we just set up a stall on the roadside and sell the potatoes? What do you think?" After entering the city and passing by a snack shop, he would say "This place has really good potatoes. I should stop the car and treat you to some. But it is too late now; we need to hurry. I have to go home and feed my starving child. His mother left me and baby."

All of this were Xu's jokes; there were no 40 pounds of potatoes in the trunk, nor was there a runaway wife or a child crying for food. Notably Xu spoke seriously when telling these jokes, so it was initially hard for me to tell whether they were facts or jokes. However, with time, I came to appreciate this unique, almost surreal form of humour. Looking back, I cannot help but chuckle at the entries in my field diary, innocently scribbled notes that, in retrospect, were clearly Lisu jokes in disguise.

6.6 Conclusion

From the foregoing description of a wedding, it is clear how important music and dance is in a Lisu traditional wedding. Performance becomes the marker of the ordering of space in a Lisu wedding ceremony. Every facet of the ceremony—the beginning, transitions, pauses, climaxes, endings, and celebrations—are guided and regulated by music and dance. The use

of music and dance in the wedding gives a distinctive rhythm and feeling to each moment of the entire ceremony.

The wedding ceremony is rich with performance of songs, dances, and *maniu* tunes. These melodies, movements, and lyrics collectively articulate an age-old tradition that venerates the ancestral spirits and the forces of nature. For example, as part of the ceremony, the groom pays respects to the ancestors and deities before leaving to collect his bride, accompanied by the spiritual melodies played by the *maniu* performer. As the matchmaker assigns the newlyweds their new names, he sings a song that references many past generations of ancestors. This serves to invoke their blessings and articulate their hopes for the couple's future. These rituals can be seen as bridging the gap between the mundane and the sacred, creating a connection between the living and the spiritual realm. They also reflect cultural continuity, the ongoing flow of life from one generation to the next.

Collective participation in dance and music creates a sense of unity and belonging, fostering social cohesion and reinforcing shared values. This communal experience affirms the interconnectedness of individuals within the community, and reinforces the idea that collective harmony is central to social prosperity.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis is not to serve as a textbook on Lisu music, instruments, or dance; in other words, it is not meant to teach readers how to sing Lisu songs, create and play Lisu musical instruments, or perform Lisu dances. In fact, the Lisu community itself does not traditionally pass on its culture through written educational materials or formal teaching methods. What drove my research were the aims of exploring Lisu musical and dance experiences and practices in order to gain insight into the worlds of Lisu music and dance as experienced from Lisu people's perspectives, and to identify and acknowledge the diversity within Lisu music culture. Moreover, I seek to examine what inspiration and insights these Lisu examples can offer for broader music and dance research, and which strategies they can potentially teach us in our efforts to improve human well-being. In this final chapter, I provide a succinct recapitulation of the discoveries and contributions of this thesis. Then, I discuss my reflections on fieldwork and the process of writing ethnography. Finally, I summarize some of the limitations of this study and point to topics worth further exploration in the future.

7.1 Findings/Contributions

7.1.1 Diversity and Identity

The historical long-term migrations spanning across a broad area, geographic conditions such as their location in the Hengduan Mountains, and natural barriers created by mountains and rivers, along with the influences of neighbouring ethnic groups, have all collectively contributed to the present multifaceted and diverse state of the Lisu culture (see Chapters 1 and 2). Throughout nearly every chapter of this thesis, I explore the how this diversity is manifested in their songs, instruments, dances, language accents, distinctive attire, and food culture. In Chapter 4, I place particular emphasis on how geographical location and the culture of neighbouring ethnic groups impact the practices of Lisu dance across different regions. Furthermore, I delve deeper to understand which aspects of these practices are more susceptible to influence, and which elements constitute their core style.

Regrettably, existing research on Lisu music has often failed to capture this dynamism inherent diversity. As introduced in the literature review in Chapter 2, most studies of Lisu

musical culture in China remain focused on categorization of songs, analysis of musical forms and elements (tonality, scale characteristics, melodic features, etc.), introduction to instrumental structures, dance classification, and more. Worryingly, even though these studies are normally based on a specific village or area, they often make sweeping generalizations about the entire Lisu population. In the words of Jonathan, researchers have often sought out "typical," "authentic" representatives of "the people" for study (Stock 1998: 51), an approach also described by Bruno Nettl as creating "cultural-average accounts" (Nettl 1983: 9). Such tendencies are not limited to research on Lisu culture; they have been extended to the broader context—minority ethnic groups in Southwest China. At its extreme, this phenomenon resembles that noted by writers like Helen Rees, who has observed that film, television, and news stories often promote a generalized image of colourful, *nengge shanwu* (literally "can sing and are good at dancing"), happy, smiling, and exotic minorities (Rees 2000: 25-26).

These mainstream accounts of the Lisu or other minority groups have often succumbed to overly narrow definitions of "authenticity," resulting in an oversimplified portrayal that neglects the rich complexities and diversity inherent in these cultures. To avoid replicating these issues in the course of writing this thesis, my aim has been to reflect not only on the music itself, but also on the individuals engaged in its creation, performance, and appreciation—each contributing their unique voice to the narrative. As highlighted in Chapter 1, my consultants encompass a broad spectrum, from renowned musicians and enthusiastic music hobbyists passionate about singing or dancing, to everyday individuals and those working in NGOs or government institutions and playing a part in cultural transmission. In an effort to preserve the authenticity of their perspectives, I have quoted them directly as much as possible, and repeatedly verified my interpretations to ensure they align with each consultant's intended expressions. When interpreting Lisu music, I strive to understand it within the framework of the Lisu worldview, acknowledging the Lisu as a minority group and as active participants in the globally shared space of humanity, with their unique musical trajectories and aspirations.

During my interactions with various Lisu individuals, I discovered that these complexities and diversity seem fundamental to the multi-layered complexities of their identity. This not only unifies them as members of the Lisu ethnic group but also differentiates them based on their specific community affiliations and individual identities. After spending a long time with Lisu consultants, I observed that these tendencies may be associated with the

characteristics and life philosophy they often use to describe their own ethnic group, such as being “free spirits” and “nonconformists”. In Chapters 3 and 5, interviews with various singers and dancers reveal that when elements of their songs and dances show integrations with the cultures of surrounding ethnic groups like the Tibetans and the Naxi, they nevertheless still yearn to exhibit unique and stable core elements of Lisu culture as a means of distinguishing themselves from such neighbours. Concurrently, the multifaceted practices of Lisu music and dance I found in different communities reveal a desire to demonstrate an identity that is both communal but still distinct from that other Lisu communities.

Meanwhile, even within the same community, different individuals strive to showcase their unique individual identities by composing very personal songs and expressing their unique interpretations of music, for example, the case discussed in Chapter 3 concerning Lisu woman Li Sizhi, whose singing tells of her life story. These songs carry two layers of meaning: the surface level provides a straightforward, beautiful song, while a deeper level conveys more subtle, personal experiences and emotions. In singing these songs, Li Sizhi is not just expressing her emotions but also reflecting on her past. Importantly, listeners interpret these songs based on their own individual identities and their relationship to Li Sizhi. Her daughter understood and identified with the songs in a particular way, given their shared experiences and close emotional connection. As an outsider, my identification with the songs inevitably differed. While I grasped the universal themes of love, loss, or struggle in Li Sizhi’s story, certain cultural nuances and personal experiences conveyed in her songs escaped my full understanding due to the difference in our backgrounds. So profound were the emotions stirred by Li Sizhi’s songs that she and her daughter were moved to tears, unable to continue singing, while I could only offer them a comforting embrace. This example underscores the multi-layered nature of the acts of both singing and listening.

Another discovery is that both songs and dances serve as critical avenues where performers express their identities. However, these cultural expressions can receive varied degrees of acceptance from audiences. Some songs, for instance, had a more challenging path to gaining recognition, as in Chapter 3, when Li Ting grappled with a complex situation amid the pandemic. While performing Lisu songs and speaking in the Lisu language during live-streamed performances, he found it challenging to engage non-Lisu speaking audiences. When he switched to Mandarin, he could potentially attract a broader audience, but he also risked failing to meet the expectations of his core Lisu audience. On the other hand, I found that dance performances were generally better received. This might be because they connect

more directly with an audience's sense of pleasure, emotions, and relations with the people around them. As I observed in Chapter 5, Lisu circle dances have a participatory nature, which aims to involve as many people as possible. Moreover, musicians would skilfully adjust the tunes and difficulty of the dance according to their judgement of the audience's ability, ensuring that everyone could keep up with the steps and rhythm. All this contributes to their broader acceptance.

In writing about such a complex and vibrant culture, it becomes essential to avoid homogenization and instead, strive to present an accurate representation of the multitude of individual experiences. I have consciously tried to showcase each Lisu individual's unique practices and viewpoints, avoiding the trap of oversimplifying their identity to the collective term "Lisu people."

7.1.2 Interactions with Humans, Non-human Beings, and Nature

Living in the digital age and especially during the aftermath of a pandemic, the transformation of social interactions from the physical to the virtual realm has been a global phenomenon. Many people's relationships, not just with each other but also with their immediate natural surroundings, have to some extent transitioned into the digital realm. Yet, numerous studies have proven that this shift has not truly enhanced life satisfaction or happiness indices. In this modern, digital context, a significant portion of the Lisu people living in mountainous regions still lead relatively simple lives. Their lifestyle, framed within the global, modern context, might be misinterpreted as "impoverished" or "underdeveloped" by mainstream standards. This reflects what anthropologists like James C. Scott (1998) have termed "high modernist ideology," which often dismisses indigenous knowledge systems. However, the frequent usage of the term "gachi" (happiness) in the Lisu community, and the spiritual contentment which is palpable in their interactions, emphasizes that there exist different paradigms of prosperity and happiness.

Throughout my research, I have scrutinized social relationships within the Lisu community, their soundscapes, and how these aspects are intertwined with their existence, cognition, and emotional expression. This connection manifests in every chapter of my thesis. For instance, birds and lambs inspiring songs and dances; the pleasure of singers and dancers in mimicking animals; the influence of bird morphology on the appearance of the musical instrument *qiben*; the development of different categories of tuning according to bird calls; and how

participatory dances serve both as a means of individual entertainment and a facilitator of social interaction within Lisu communities.

Beyond this, I hope to highlight how such wonderful interactions can play a role in environmental conservation and mitigating climate change. Global climate change and deforestation have directly impacted biodiversity, which, in turn, has influenced the overall musical landscape of the Lisu people. Over recent decades, an increasing number of scholars have begun to engage with and report on direct connections to the natural world expressed by local residents, leading us to consider afresh relationships between sound and music in conjunction with the human and non-human environment (Guy 2009, Post 2019).

During interviews, the Lisu often voiced concerns about deteriorating environmental conditions and dwindling animal populations. Their intimate understanding of the environment is not only developed but also communicated through their music and dance practices. For instance, until the 1980s, most of the Lisu in the mountains didn't have a formal calendar with which to discern the passage of time and seasonal changes. Their songs, especially among the older generation, still emphasize how the call of the cuckoo bird symbolizes the time to sow seeds. The flowering of certain plants or the migration of specific birds might signify the arrival of a new season. Even as certain animals that were once common have become increasingly rare due to environmental changes, their presence persists in Lisu music. For example, in Chapter 4, a *qiben* performer I interviewed recounted a bird species he had observed in his youth but had not seen in recent years. Nevertheless, its unique call lives on in the tuning of the *qiben*. This practice respects and memorializes the bird, preserving elements of the environmental soundscape within the musical tradition. The process of creating *qiben* also often incorporates elements of environmental stewardship as well. The story, form, and fabrication of the instrument embed cultural knowledge about the materials used and the environments from which they originate. Through the act of making and playing these instruments, this knowledge is subsequently shared with other community members, forging a living but vulnerable connection between their musical traditions and their local environment.

Collectively, Lisu music and dance embodies not only the context of their communally defined spaces, time, environment, and people, but it is also rooted deeply in their understanding of their own history, contact with nature, and life strategies. I hope that the Lisu's experiences in this regard can provide a case study for improving human happiness

indices and contributing to human welfare. Their harmonious way of life offers valuable lessons on the importance of reconnecting with our natural environment. This way of life could also provide a model of sustainable solutions for preserving cultural heritage and mitigating environmental challenges.

7.2 Reflections on Ethnography and Fieldwork

In this section, I wish to reflect on my ethnographic fieldwork and the writing process. This topic has not been discussed in my thesis so far, but I consider it important and thus want to address it now. It is about experience.

Many scholars have researched the importance of "experience" in fieldwork (Titon 2008, Rice 2008). During my own fieldwork, I observed a fascinating phenomenon where the term "experience" in Chinese can indeed be understood differently, and correspondingly subtly different words are used to describe these distinctions: *jingyan* (经验), *jingli* (经历), and *tiyan* (体验). These three words can all be translated as "experience" in English, yet they each carry slightly different connotations. *Jingyan* refers to the knowledge or skills one accrues over time through practice or participation. It is about learning and growth, with an emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge or skills. *Jingli* pertains to the events, situations, or experiences that one has navigated through life. It emphasizes the journey and the incidents along the way, focusing more on life events or personal history. *Tiyan* relates to the process of directly and personally encountering or undergoing something. It's about personal involvement and firsthand experience.

Here, my aim is not to dissect their minute linguistic differences. Instead, I want to set aside the gaining and accumulation of personal knowledge or skills (*jingyan*) and focusing instead on the personal involvement and firsthand encounters that I experienced (*jingli* and *tiyan*). Before setting foot in the field in 2020-2021, I invested a significant amount of time in academic preparation. From understanding scholarly research to consuming various resources, I developed un understanding of the overall structure of Lisu music culture and some "homogenized" knowledge, such as the three major modes of folk songs and the various forms of Lisu dances. Armed with this theoretical knowledge, I ventured into the field with an open mind and heart. My early fieldwork approach involved visiting multiple Lisu

villages, each for short periods. I aimed to see the culture from various angles, acknowledging that each village had its unique music practices and each person had their unique interpretations, sayings, and explanations. This strategy significantly enhanced my knowledge reserves, providing me with varying perspectives. But it was not without challenges. I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of new information. I found myself struggling to weave these disparate strands of knowledge into a coherent narrative.

Feeling overwhelmed, I relocated to family a pure Lisu village far away from city after five months. This was a retreat of sorts, a place with fewer distractions, enabling me to fully immerse myself in daily Lisu life. The first few weeks were a period of acclimatization for both parties, with polite and reserved interactions. However, as time progressed, our mutual familiarity grew. We began to share chores, collecting and chopping wood, cooking, enjoying tea and chats, feeding animals, and farming. I was lucky to be welcomed by a very friendly family that embraced me as one of their own. Their matriarch was particularly fond of singing, and I was included in all activities, whether it was celebrating festivals, paying respects at graves, weekend excursions, attending funerals, or discussing family challenges.

During this time, I refrained from asking music-related questions out of context, letting the villagers lead most conversations. My objective was to engage as naturally as possible, and when appropriate, explore music-related topics. Apart from daily village life, I collaborated with the locals on an instrumental ensemble project in Weixi. After work, I would return "home" and casually discuss the day's work with my Lisu family.

Through this second phase of my fieldwork, I found myself becoming more in tune with the Lisu's way of life, consciousness, living environment, and worldview. These *tiyan* and *jingli* began to subtly shape my perception. Many of the questions I had been struggling during the early stage of my fieldwork began to be answered during this time. The lived experiences of spending day and night with the villagers during this second part helped me identify previously unnoticed questions and understand which questions about and themes in Lisu culture deserved further exploration and which were not as critical from their perspectives. As I transitioned back into the writing stage, I realized the value of the immersive experiences I had accumulated. Some might question, what impact these *jingli* and *tiyan* have on my writing? In reality, the influence on writing is not direct; instead, they shape the person, and then the person influences the writing. I needed to draw nourishment from a wide and deep

range of social experiences as reading and even interviews cannot replace real-life, personal experiences.

This personal involvement and firsthand experience became crucial in deeply understanding the nuances of Lisu culture, especially when we encountered situations that our consultants could not explain, or when certain aspects of the culture could not be fully understood through observation. On the importance of understanding, Jeff Titon proposed the concept of "the study of people experiencing music," emphasizing that "understanding (rather than explaining) the lived experience of people making music (ourselves included) is paramount", and "through common, intersubjective experience we enter the world of interpretation" ((Titon 2008: 29, 32). Similarly, Timothy Rice has argued, "Understanding, in this tradition, precedes explanation rather being the product of it" (Rice 2012: 56). Thus, how we understand and to what extent we formed an understanding seems to be of crucial importance. In response to these ideas, I involved myself in the musical practices, social activities, and interpersonal relationships of the Lisu community to stimulate my own introspection and contemplation. This was integral to nurturing my cognition and my self-understanding.

This focus on *tiyan* and *jingli* as a form of personal involvement and firsthand encounter has shaped my approach to ethnography, inviting a more engaged, participatory, and immersive form of scholarship. Not only does this honour honours the complexity, dynamism, and richness of Lisu cultural practices, but also moves significantly towards achieving a comprehensive "understanding."

7.3 Limitations and Future Prospects

7.3.1 ICH Practice and Politics

One limitation in this thesis is the amount of space I could give to the consideration of the problem of the sustainability of minority cultural practices in an environment where majority Han Chinese culture is predominant. In that setting, I was unable to fully delve into the influence of political and ideological opportunities and constraints on cultural preservation efforts. For example, government-backed initiatives often require alignment with state-prescribed ideologies, such as a unified Chinese national identity, which can lead to a degree

of homogenization in cultural representations and overshadow or distort unique ethnic narratives and traditions. This dynamic, although touched upon in the thesis, would benefit from further detailed examination.

Moreover, the thesis touched on but could not explore in-depth the issues arising during the project approval processes. For example, the Lisu people living within the Naxi Autonomous County, despite having a distinctive cultural heritage, often find it challenging to secure recognition for their practices. When the Lisu residing in the Lijiang region sought to apply for recognition of their unique *maniu* making techniques and traditional tunes, their efforts were categorized under Naxi cultural heritage, despite differences in tunes and practice. Despite numerous feedback and appeals, the issue remains unresolved. In fact, from the public list of 2021, not only were some Lisu applications categorized as Naxi cultural heritage, but applications from other groups, such as the Bai people, suffered the same fate. One might surmise that such practices are not exclusively limited to the Lisu or the Naxi, but they also pervade across regions inhabited by other autonomous ethnic groups. These practices, in some extent, reinforce regional and ethnic hierarchies and can lead to the erasure or distortion of minority cultural identities.

There is a need for increased transparency, fairness, and inclusivity in the evaluation and recognition of cultural heritage. This is an area that was only briefly covered in this thesis due to space constraints, but its importance cannot be overstated. Despite these limitations, I did manage to identify several potential solutions, including raising awareness during the application process, persistently negotiating with application authorities to uphold copyright protections, and offering increased assistance to minority communities, particularly in areas such as application writing and material collection. However, the effectiveness of these solutions could be further assessed in future research.

Besides, the role and impact of government initiatives, intangible cultural heritage programs, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in supporting cultural preservation was a significant part. These initiatives play a critical role in funding and publicizing cultural preservation efforts, but there is potential for more in-depth exploration of their practices, their success rates, and their influence on the broader societal status of minority cultures. Future research specifically on these intercultural dynamics would have much to reveal about the broader situation facing minority groups in China today.

7.3.2 The Scope of Music Content

The second limitation of my thesis revolves around the content of the Lisu music investigated. While my study offers a valuable exploration of traditional Lisu musical practices, the scope was inevitably limited in certain respects. Predominantly, the thesis focused on traditional Lisu music practices, with less emphasis placed on Lisu popular music. In reality, many songs that local people identify as Lisu popular music uniquely blend a host of traditional practices. At times, it becomes challenging to categorize these as strictly traditional or popular, such as the Lisu language songs by Ashicai and Zhu Lifan mentioned in Chapter 3. In this context, it would be more accurate to say that, due to constraints in time and resources, the sphere of Lisu popular music and modernized practices, particularly those by younger generation Lisu singers, remains an area to be further explored. Future research could extend more deeply into this facet to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Lisu music within the modern context.

Additionally, certain essential musical genres were unfortunately not thoroughly investigated due to cultural and personal constraints. For instance, I was unable to gain access to funeral ceremonies and their associated music due to the community's aversion towards external observation and documentation of such sacred rituals. Furthermore, the collection of certain types of music, such as Lisu erotic songs, was impeded by personal circumstances. Despite hearing fascinating accounts about Lisu men singing intriguingly explicit songs, as a woman, I found that my informants were often too embarrassed to sing them to me. As a result, a significant facet of Lisu musical culture remains underexplored.

On the geographic front, my research was concentrated on the specific regions and communities mentioned in the thesis. As highlighted earlier, Lisu culture is diverse, with practices varying greatly across different regions. The practices examined in this thesis are, therefore, representative of specific Lisu communities within certain geographical boundaries, but cannot be generalized to reflect the practices of the broader Lisu population. By investigating Lisu musical practices in other regions, future studies could present a more comprehensive understanding of the Lisu's diverse cultural practices, thereby giving a fuller representation of this multifaceted cultural heritage.

7.3.3 Lisu Cross-Border Study

The final limitation I want to address relates to the cross-border study of Lisu music culture. As an ethnic group, the Lisu are uniquely positioned, straddling the geopolitical boundaries

of several nations including China, Myanmar, Thailand, and India. This transnational existence provides them with a diverse set of socio-cultural experiences that shape their musical practices. This cross-border perspective was initially a plan of my research as mentioned in Chapter 1, but had to be set aside due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and remains unexplored in this thesis.

During a short-term fieldwork visit in 2019 to the Lisu community in the Myitkyina region of Myanmar, I identified several potential research questions that carry significant exploratory value. The local Lisu community was in the process of establishing the Myitkyina Lisu Cultural Research Association and preparing for a cultural exchange program with Chinese Lisu in 2021. Their intention was to foster stronger ties, encouraging mutual learning between these two groups. However, due to the pandemic, this initiative was presumably put on hold. Had it proceeded, this would have presented an excellent opportunity to trace characteristics of Lisu music endowed by migration and by divergent historical pathways and explore the importance and roles of music and music retention in cross-ethnic communication and cross-border migration. Furthermore, it would have offered insights into how different musical practices of the same ethnic group have been influenced under varying national influences.

Such research would necessitate considerations of several interconnected themes, such as musical creation and dissemination, identity, politics and diaspora, as well as the impacts of globalization. By investigating these aspects, future research could gain deeper insights into the intricate interplay of cultural preservation, adaptation, and transformation within the Lisu community across national borders. This transnational approach would indeed constitute a significant advancement in Lisu studies, providing a more nuanced understanding of the Lisu people’s cultural dynamics in our increasingly globalized world.

Glossaries

Lisu terms

achi mugua a dance popular among the Lisu people of Weixi. The term *achi* refers to a goat, and *mugua* refers to an ancient tune, 阿尺木刮

gaqie a term used in the Lijiang mountainous area to refer to dancing, 噶且/打跳

maniu/apubi mouth organ, 葫芦笙

magu/chuchu wooden jews harp, 口弦

mugua old song, 古调

qiben four strings lute, 起奔/期奔

jizi lisu two strings violin, 吉资

jülü bamboo flute, 菊律

waqi/gaqi a popular instrumental ensemble dance prevalent in the Weixi region, 瓦器/瓦期

tune a recognizable melodic frame which like the melody of a strophic song, and changes with repetition without an identifiable original from or variant, 调

muji luoji is an Lisu epic poem representing the creation of the world or Genesis Legend. “Mu” refer to the universe or sky, “luo” or “mi” refer to the earth or ground, and “li” means achievement or creation, 目级倮级

nipa acts as an intermediary between the human world and the spiritual realm. They perform essential rituals, conduct healing sessions, and provide spiritual guidance to members of the community, 尼琶

muleng the traditional wooden houses of the Lisu people, 木楞房

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Appendix

Playlist of Lisu song, dance music, and other minority music from younger-generation Lisu music enthusiast Xiong Yonglin

1. ***Amilai nibieku*** "Don't Cry, Amilai", 阿咪来你别哭. Lisu song by Xiangyin Band [乡音组合]
2. ***Baogu hua*** "Corn Flower", 苞谷花. Lisu song by Ana Siyu [阿娜思语]
3. ***Beiyiwang de qiutian*** "The Forgotten Autumn", 被遗忘的秋天. Lisu song by Sanjiang Band [三江组合]
4. ***Beushang gesheng quyuanfang*** "Carry the Song to the Distant Place", 背上歌声去远方.Lisu song by Sanjiang Band [三江组合]
5. ***Bie zhiji*** "Bye, Friend", 别知己. Yi song by Hailai Amu [海来阿木]
6. ***Chuiqi wode hulusheng*** "Blow my Hulusheng", 吹起我的葫芦笙. Lisu song by Cai Xuezhen [蔡学珍]
7. ***Daini quliulang*** "Take You to Wander", 带你去流浪. Lisu song by Sinaiguran Aci [斯乃古然.阿此]
8. ***Damei yingjiang*** "What a Beauty Yingjiang", 大美盈江. Lisu song by Lisu Wawa [傈僳娃娃], Ana Siyu [阿娜思语], Reba Zhaxi [热巴扎西] and Aima Longjie [艾玛龙杰]
9. ***Dashan zouchu de haizi*** "The Child Walking Out of the Mountain", 大山走出的孩子. Tibetan song by Genxia [根呷]
10. ***Ga qilai*** "Let's High", 噶起来. Lisu song by Lieren Band [猎人组合]
11. ***Gachichi,*** "Ga Chi Chi"噶迟迟. Lisu song by He Wanlian [和万莲]
12. ***Gai hele*** "It is Time for Drink", 该喝了. Lisu song by Ana Siyu [阿娜思语]
13. ***Ganjiu zui*** "Cheers Song", 干酒醉. Lisu song by Wending [吻丁]
14. ***Huajiao piaoxiang*** "Pepper Fragrance", 花椒飘香. Lisu song by Wang Tianhai [王天海]
15. ***Huanle hulusheng fengbao*** "Happy Storm on Hulusheng", 欢乐葫芦笙风暴. Music sketch collection
16. ***Hulunbeier da caoyuan*** "Hulun Buir Grassland", 呼伦贝尔大草原. Inner Mongolia Song by Qiribu [齐日布]

17. ***Huotang yuanwu*** “Fire Pond Round Dance”, 火塘圆舞. Lisu song by He Wanlian [和万莲]
18. ***Jiduo mugua,*** “Jiduo Mugua” 吉多木刮. Lisu song by Lieren Band [猎人组合]
19. ***Jingni yiwan qingkejiu*** “A Bow of Qingke”, 敬你一碗青稞酒. Tibetan song by Rongzhong Erjia [容中尔甲]
20. ***Jiuge*** “Drink Song”, 酒歌. Yi Song by He Shuncai [贺顺才]
21. ***Laiguo nide shengming de wo*** “I Have Come to Your Life”, 来过你的生命的我. Yi song by Hailai Amu [海来阿木]
22. ***Langman de mengxiang*** “Romantic Dream”, 浪漫的梦想. Lisu song by Lieren Band [猎人组合]
23. ***Lanxiang zhilian*** “Love in Lanxiang”, 兰乡之恋. Lisu song by He Wanlian [和万莲]
24. ***Libai*** “Li Bai”, 李白. Han Pop Song by Li Ronghao [李荣浩]
25. ***Lisu ernu*** “Lisu Songs and Daughters”, 傈僳儿女. Lisu song by Sanjiang Band [三江组合]
26. ***Lisu guniang*** “Lisu Girl”, 傈僳姑娘. Lisu song by Zuo Shou [左手]
27. ***Lisu nühai*** “Lisu Girl”, 傈僳女孩. Lisu song by Simiworan Mayi [斯密沃然玛依]
28. ***Lisu jiayuan*** “Lisu Garden”, 傈僳家园. Lisu song by Simiworan Mayi [斯密沃然玛依]
29. ***Lisu jiuge*** “Lisu Drink Song”, 傈僳酒歌. Lisu song by Sanjiang Band [三江组合]
30. ***Lisu qibuqu*** “Seven Steps: Lisu Music”, 傈僳七步曲. Lisu song by He Dehua [和德华].
31. ***Lisu qinge*** “Lisu Love Song”, 傈僳情歌. Lisu song by Dengsike [灯思克]
32. ***Lisu qingge*** “Lisu Love Song”, 傈僳情歌. Lisu song by Simiworan Mayi [斯密沃然玛依]
33. ***Lisu ren*** “Lisu People”, 傈僳人. Lisu song by Lisu Wawa Band [傈僳娃娃]
34. ***Lisu zamo liang*** “So Bright! Lisu People”, 傈僳咋么亮! Lisu song by Music Band Lisu Shi [傈僳史组合].
35. ***Meigui*** “Rose”, 玫瑰. Lisu song by Sinaiguran Aci [斯乃古然.阿此]
36. ***Meiguo lisuzu ge*** “American Lisu Music”.
37. ***Menghui nanjieluo*** “Dream Back on Nanjieluo”, 梦回南姐洛. Lisu song by Lisu Wawa Band [傈僳娃娃]

38. ***Mosuo yao*** “Mosuo Song”, 摩梭谣. Naxi song by He Wenjun [和文军]
39. ***Qiben qingge*** “Love Song on Qiben”, 其奔情歌. Lisu song by Huang Que [凰雀].
40. ***Qingdao lisu shanzhai lai*** “Welcome to Lisu Village”, 请到傈僳山寨来. Lisu song by Ashicai [阿石才]
41. ***Qingge duichang*** “Love Duet”, 情歌对唱. Lisu song by Dengsike [灯思克]
42. ***Qinlao zhifu*** “Achieve Prosperity Through Hard Work”, 勤劳致富. Lisu song by Cai Xuezhen [蔡学珍]
43. ***Rensheng mochou*** “Don’t Worry on Life”, 人生莫愁. Naxi song by He Lilong [和丽龙]
44. ***Ruhua de amei*** “Amei as Flower”, 如花的阿妹. Lisu song by Wending [吻丁]
45. ***Sanduo huan*** “Three Flowers”, 三朵花. Lisu song by Sanjiang Band [三江组合]
46. ***Shangxin jiuge*** “Sad Song on Drink”, 伤心酒歌. Lisu song by Ashicai [阿石才]
47. ***Shanli de nuhai*** “A Girl in Mountain”, 山里的女孩. Lisu song by Simiworan Mayi [斯密沃然玛依]
48. ***Sinian*** “Missing”, 思念. Lisu song by Ashicai [阿石才]
49. ***Sinian ni*** “Missing You”, 想念你. Lisu Song by Xiangyin Band [乡音组合]
50. ***Taxiang xiangni*** “Miss You on Alien Land”, 他乡想你. Lisu song by Sanjiang Band [三江组合]
51. ***Tian lanlan*** “Blue Sky”, 天蓝蓝. Lisu song by Simiworan Mayi [斯密沃然玛依]
52. ***Tianbian de bagelazong*** “Celestial Bagelazong”, 天边的巴拉格宗. Tibetan song by Genxia [根呷]
53. ***Tianxia lisuren*** “Lisu People on the World”. 天下傈僳人.Lisu song by Xiangyin Band [乡音组合]
54. ***Turan xiangni*** “Suddenly Missing You”, 突然想你. Lisu song by Xiangyin Band [乡音组合]
55. ***Wangqing Niuroumian*** “Forgive Love and Beef Noodles”, 忘情牛肉面. Han Pop Song by Ma Jiantao [马健涛]
56. ***Wode Lijiang*** “My Lijiang”, 我的丽江. Naxi song by He Wenjun [和文军]
57. ***Wozai Weixi dengni*** “I am Waiting for you on Wexi”, 我在维西等你. Lisu song by

Simiworan Mayi [斯密沃然玛依], Yu Wei[于伟] and Sinaiguran Aci [斯乃古然.阿此]

58. ***Wuyue de sinian*** “Missing in May”, 五月的思念. Lisu song by Sanjiang Band [三江组合]
59. ***Xi xiangfeng*** “Happy Meeting”, 喜相逢. Lisu song by Huang Que [凰雀]
60. ***Xiangge lila*** “Shangri-la”, 香格里拉. Tibetan song by Rongzhong Erjia [容中尔甲]
61. ***Xiangyin*** “Hometown Song”, 乡音. Lisu song by Xiangyin Band [乡音组合]
62. ***Xingfu yao***“Happy Song", 幸福谣. Lisu song by Wending [吻丁].
63. ***Xiongmei duichang*** “Brother and Sister on Duet”, 兄妹对唱. Lisu song by Cai Xuezhen [蔡学珍]
64. ***Yilanxiong*** “Concentric Wine”, 依兰雄. Lisu song by Lisu Wawa Band [傈僳娃娃]
65. ***Youjian gaoyuanhong*** “See again, Gaoyuanhong”, 又见高原红. Tibetan song by Rongzhong Erjia [容中尔甲]
66. ***Yuanfang you xinyang*** “There is Faith in the Distance”, 远方有信仰. Lisu song by Hailai Amu [海来阿木]
67. ***Yueliang haimei shengqilai*** “The Moon Hasn’t Risen yet”, 月亮还没升起来. Lisu song by Lisu Wawa Band [傈僳娃娃]
68. ***Yulong huange*** “Happy Song on Yulong”, 玉龙欢歌. Naxi song by He Lilong [和丽龙]
69. ***Zilaile*** “Zi La Lei”, 子拉勒. Lisu song by Ashicai [阿石才]