MUSICAL CHANGE IN HUOBAJIE: RECONTEXTUALIZING NUOSU YI
IDENTITY

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Abstract

The Nuosu Yi people in China’s Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces have developed many practices and traditions to express their cultural distinctiveness. For the Yi people Huobajie (Fire Torch Festival) is the most important event to reify the Nuosu collective identity in various regions, but the Chinese state also sees Huobajie as an opportunity to promote the festival as a representation of a unified Chinese nation. Although the People’s Republic of China governance officially banned Huobajie during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), more recently Han district officials not only encourage the festival’s occurrence, but are also sent to host, judge, and participate in the festival events. This increased attention on the state level has led to increased tension between the Yi and the Han officials, resulting in changes to the music and performance, which in turn have altered the overall structure and meaning of the festival.

In this thesis I examine the musical representation and competition in the Laoyaoshan Nuosu Yi minority group’s Huobajie to interpret the ways in which state-sponsored development affect the process of change in Nuosu Yi music behavior and conceptualization, as well as their self and collective identity. I argue that the attempt in 2011 to recontextualize Huobajie events implemented by an external force led to the realization amongst the Yi that music and performance is a significant form of power and self-representation, resulting in a cultural awakening and a return to independent sponsorship of Huobajie festivities in 2012. This thesis also emphasizes the importance of documenting the decision-making processes of individuals and groups to help track the changes of music and cultural values within a group.
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**Note on Romanization**

All Mandarin Chinese terms are referred to using the pinyin system of character transcription, the official system recognized by the People’s Republic of China. Yi language terms follow the standard Nuosu/Shynra dialect romanization likewise recognized by the People’s Republic of China, and also found in the *Nuosu Yi-Chinese-English Glossary*. All photographs were taken by myself, or by my sister, or by my lifelong friend Alexander Minkin.
Chapter I: Introduction

(i) Introduction

I first became intrigued with the Nuosu Yi *Huobajie* (Fire Torch Festival 火把节) during my observation of the event at Laoyaoshan (老药山) near the Tiger Leaping Gorge in Yunnan Province, People’s Republic of China (PRC) in July 2011.
Among other festivals such as Xinghuijie and New Years, Huobajie is considered to be the most important amongst the Yi people. The Yi are the seventh largest populace minority group in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and are primarily located in the Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou Provinces. Through observation and interviews with Yi participants in Laoyaoshan, it became clear to me that Huobajie is undergoing significant changes from previous years, many of which are being implemented by local Han government officials. Government influenced alterations of minority groups’ musical customs and traditions is an ongoing process in China, and is one that warrants an investigation and analysis to elucidate the perspectives and motivations of both the Nuosu Yi and of the Chinese state in relation to music and culture.

The Nuosu Yi have developed many practices and traditions to express their cultural distinctiveness. Huobajie is one such activity that exhibits the Nuosu collective
identity in various regions, and thus is seen as opportunity by the Chinese state to both control the presentation of the festival and act as a representation of a unified Chinese nation. Huobajie is the most important holiday amongst the Nuosu Yi, and usually takes place annually from July 25-27. While the PRC government officially banned Huobajie during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), more recently the state not only encourages the festival’s occurrence, but also sends district officials to judge and participate in the festival events. This increased attention on the state level has implemented a monetary reward system at various locations for the “top” performers of the singing and dancing competition, which in turn has changed the overall structure of the festival.

In this thesis I examine the musical representation and competition in the Nuosu Yi minority group’s Huobajie to interpret the ways in which state-sponsored development affects the process of change in Nuosu Yi music behavior and conceptualization, as well as their self and collective identity. With this evidence, I argue that the attempt in 2011 to recontextualize Huobajie events implemented by an external force led to the realization amongst the Yi that music and performance is a significant form of power and self-representation, resulting in a cultural awakening and a return to independent sponsorship of Huobajie festivities in 2012. In addition, this thesis emphasizes the importance of documenting the decision-making processes of individuals and groups to help track the changes of music and cultural values within a group. Establishing a context based on an investigation of each group’s desires, grievances, intentions, and actions is crucial for understanding how and why changes occur the way they do.

(ii) Significance of Study
Many prominent early writings in the field of ethnomusicology are examples of case studies in which musical change is a reflection of internal shifts in conceptualization societal norms or structure (Blacking 1978; Caton 1979; Merriam 1954; Meyer 1967; Nettl 1978, 2005; Sachs 1964). In other words, there is some degree of understanding or reasoning within a cultural group as to why changes are occurring the way they are, both sonically and behaviorally. However, my observations and conclusions based on the audience’s reaction to the events taking place at the 2011 Huobajie lead me to believe that the musical changes occurring among the Yi exemplify a process of external recontextualization of the event by the state, in this case the context of the Huobajie setting, performance repertoire, dress, symbolic meanings, and sound, with the intent of establishing newly defined standardizations. The officials implementing these changes want the Huobajie performances in Laoyaoshan to display a more inclusive, pan-ethnic atmosphere in order to reach a more general audience and promote tourism and development. Hosting the Laoyaoshan Huobajie event in 2011 was an attempt by Han government officials based in the local town of Qiaotou to control and promote the minority festival activities, while at the same time altering the internal conceptualization of what Huobajie should be as culturally accepted by the Yi themselves.

Many questions arise when attempting to analyze the Huobajie recontextualization process and its effects on the Nuosu Yi community. The following questions will be addressed throughout the thesis: (1) What styles and musical elements are being performed during the competition currently, and how do they differ from previous years when the state was not involved? (2) How does state involvement change and adjust performance standardization among the Yi, thereby altering the cultural
event’s meaning and significance? (3) What role do structural and symbolic signs play in recontextualizing Yi identity and altering the representation of Huobajie? (4) How does the promotion of a pan-ethnic atmosphere though performance affect Huobajie’s significance to the Yi and the Han? (5) How did the government’s mandate for musical performance affect the self-perception of Laoyaoshan Yi in relation to others?

Addressing these questions answer why the state has suddenly began participating in the festival activities, and how that involvement introduced an ongoing process of performative negotiation that shapes and reconstructs the Nuosu Yi’s understanding of themselves in relation to the state and vice-versa.

Many factors contribute to the recontextualizing process of Huobajie in Laoyaoshan. First, significant changes took place due to the ever-increasing Han government presence, administration, and overall control the Huobajie festival activities. Many of the changes to the 2011 Huobajie were due to various contextual shifts of the performance setting, which for the first time switched the role of the Yi to the Han state government. Second, the display of Huobajie as a “pan-ethnic” atmosphere, the introduction of technology, and the musical performances themselves indicate that an attempt was made to change the form of Huobajie from a Yi-specific holiday to an all-inclusive tourist spectacle. Third, changes in the Huobajie musical repertoire to one almost entirely comprised of Mandarin lyrics reveals the gradual acculturation process that has been occurring amongst the maturing Yi youth who have been raised in Han institutions and bi-cultural scenarios. As a result, the sonic and musical elements themselves are undergoing significant changes in an attempt to adapt to these newly imposed standards. Lastly, the realization on the part of the Laoyaoshan community that
such rapid musical changes implemented in 2011 were in turn affecting the very purpose and meaning of Huobajie and Yi culture in general led to a cultural revitalization of sorts. In 2012 the Yi of Laoyaoshan independently decided to sponsor the Huobajie events. The recontextualization of the 2012 Huobajie performance setting and musical practice thus not only demonstrates the struggle and negotiation that takes place between minority and dominant groups, but also exemplifies music's vital role in recontextualizing a group's sense of identity and the degree to which they control their own destiny.

The Nuosu Yi Huobajie case study provides a compelling example of the extent to which changes in minority group representation in China are not only implemented externally by state standards, but are also being derived internally by members of the minority groups who are fostered in such adaptive contexts. In terms of outside influence, it was the introduction of new performance standards mandated by Han preferences in 2011 that facilitated those changes. Internally, however, methods of resistance and increased focus on musical activities and cultural awareness within Laoyaoshan in 2012 inspired a return to the Yi-exclusive Huobajie context practiced in years past, but with a newly exerted abundance of musical repertoire and performances. I hope this thesis can help serve the field of ethnomusicology by examining both the various conceptual and behavioral elements that precipitate the process of musical and cultural change within an ethnic minority group facing homogenizing pressures, and the ongoing negotiation process amongst the groups that facilitate such changes.

Ethnomusicology scholar Bruno Nettl likewise speaks to the importance of documenting not only the product, but also the process of musical change to enhance the field's analytical framework:
...I would suggest that one theoretical direction in which we could move is to add to the musical artifact— the piece, the song, the individual situation as the focus of study— ways in which the fact and process of change itself can somehow be used as the main focus of attention... If we are indeed to preserve something about music, we must find ways also of preserving and recording the concept part of the model; this seems to me to be in fact more urgent ethnomusicology than the continuing preservation of the musical artifact alone.

(iii) Methodology and Fieldwork

Figure 3. An evening of translating Nuosu song lyrics in Jiajia's home.

I first traveled to Laoyaoshan to attend the Huobajie celebration there in July 2011. Xiaoluo, a Yi friend of mine in Shangrila invited me to go Laoyaoshan to visit her
older sister, Jiajia, and to see the Huobajie music and dance performance there. After video and audio recording excerpts from the majority of the performances, I stayed in Jiajia’s guesthouse with her three sons. I became intrigued with what I witnessed in Laoyaoshan that year, and devoted the following academic year to researching all available sources on Nuosu Yi music traditions and culture. Upon receiving the Summer 2012 Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) and 2012-13 Fulbright scholarships, I returned to Laoyaoshan in May 2012. I traveled to Laoyaoshan a total of seven times in 2012 to continue conducting the necessary research needed for this thesis. The longest duration I stayed for was seventeen days leading up to and during Huobajie 2012, and the shortest duration was for five days. The average duration of my trips out to the village was seven days.

Traveling to Laoyaoshan takes days of advanced planning every time. From Kunming, I travel ten hours north by bus to Qiaotou. There are two options for traveling to Laoyaoshan from Qiaotou: hiking approximately thirteen kilometers up a mountain path, or packing in to the one truck that goes from Laoyaoshan to Qiaotou and back once every five days for supplies (fengjirí逢集日). I often travel with spare clothes, recording equipment, and my guitar, and therefore it is easier and much more convenient to travel up in the truck on market day. However, I did hike up the mountain twice, and frequently hiked down the mountain on return trips back to Qiaotou (approximately ten times). The most common scenario is for me to call Jiajia, set up a meeting place in Qiaotou on market day, purchase food and supplies, and ride the truck up to Laoyaoshan. From the home of the truck owners, we hike the remaining half-kilometer to Jiajia’s house.
While residing in the village leading up to the Huobajie 2012 performance, I acted as a participant observer, often taking part in the practice dance sessions. At the initial dance practice sessions, I would typically dance for entirety of the meeting. Approximately one week before the Huobajie performance was to take place, I began only rehearsing each dance song once through, and always stood individually, next to but separate from the other dance lines. I also suggested we record a sort of “dress rehearsal” prior to the performance, which allowed each dancer to see themselves individually and collectively and determine how to improve for the actual performance two days later on August 12th. None of this would have been possible without the use of my digital recording equipment, and Laoyushan residents were grateful that I was willing to record and prepare DVDs of their performances at no cost.

For video recordings, I used a Kodak Playsport Zx3 High Definition (HD) waterproof video recorder. The Kodak Playsport handheld device included a miniature tripod, and was also extremely convenient when mobile in a harsh terrain. For audio recording interviews, I used a Zoom H4n digital recorder. For digital photographs, I used
a Canon EOS Rebel T3. In addition, my sister Katherine Richter and my friend Alex Minkin accompanied me on one trip to the village and took digital photographs using a Canon 5D Mark 2.

(iv) Literature Review

In this thesis, I primarily reference English and Chinese language sources in the fields of ethnomusicology, anthropology, and Yi studies. Anthropologist Stevan Harrell is the most published scholar on topics related to the Nuosu Yi, and has been researching in the Liangshan, Sichuan Province region since the late 1980’s. I refer to six of Harrell’s publications, most of which he co-wrote with Yi indigenous scholars. Erik Mueggler is also an anthropologist specializing in White Yi ritual culture near Chuxiong, Yunnan Province. Chapter V [section (i)] draws heavily on one of Mueggler’s articles entitled “Dancing Fools: Politics of Culture and Place in a “Traditional Nationality Festival,” as many of features of the 2011-2012 Huobajie negotiation process are comparable to Mueggler’s findings amongst the Chuxiong Yi and their local officials in regards to festival sponsorship.

As for Chinese language sources on Yi music and culture, Piao Yongguang’s “Traditional Dance Performance of the Sichuan Liangshan Yi Minority” outlines various features known about Yi dance types and movements, as well as their meanings. Piao is heavily referenced in Chapter II, section (iii). Another Chinese language resource used to examine norms related to Huobajie is in Zhu Wenxu’s “Yi Minority Fire Torch Festival.” In addition, several People’s Daily articles are quoted to compare with Piao’s work, as well as to highlight actions of the PRC in relation to the Yi’s Huobajie.
Comparable works to this case study written by ethnomusicologists are referred to throughout this thesis. The ethnomusicology works most referenced include Lorraine Aragon’s "Suppressed and Revised Performances: Raego’ Songs of Central Sulawesi," Phillip Bohlman’s “The land where two streams flow”: music in the German-Jewish community of Israel,” Steven Feld’s “Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression,” David Harnish’s "New Lines, Shifting Identities: Interpreting Change at the Lingsar Festival in Lombok,” John E. Kaemmer’s "Social Power and Music Change among the Shona,” Alan Merriam’s “The Anthropology of Music,” Jane Sugerman’s "The Nightingale and the Partridge: Singing and Gender among Prespa Albanians," and Frank Tenaille’s “Music Is the Weapon of the Future: Fifty Years of African Popular Music.” The sources were all chosen based on their relevance to issues pertaining to music and identity, introduction of new musical elements into a society, and musical change at large. All of aforementioned sources are utilized to provide background context, offer references with comparable themes and subject matter, and aid in the overall analysis of Laoyushan’s 2011 and 2012 Huobajie.

(v) Locale of Investigation: Laoyaoshan
Laoyaoshan is a relatively remote mountain district (approximately 10,800 ft. elevation) comprised entirely of Nuosu Yi families. There is an “upper (上)” Laoyaoshan and a “lower (下) Laoyaoshan, distinguishable primarily by the natural divisions of the terrain. The current generation of youth (ages 18 and under) is the 6th generation to live in Laoyaoshan, dating the migration back over two hundred years. Official records at the government office in Qiaotou (approximately 6,500 ft.), the nearest city, indicate that the local population of Laoyaoshan is roughly one hundred people, though in fact the population is closer to about five hundred residents. The primary reason for this discrepancy is that families with multiple children would fall in violation of the one-child policy and would thereby be subjected to steep annual fines. Many residents with more than one or two children will not officially register their children in order to avoid such a burden, especially if the child is female, in which case she would most likely not attend
school at Qiaotou and therefore not be found in any records. However, there were only about fifty people living in Upper Laoyaoshan that I would see on a regular basis.

Currently there are only three women who come from places other than Laoyaoshan- one from Dali, one from Wuxi, and one from Liangshan. Prior to Jiajia, the first woman to move to the region in 1995, Laoyaoshan males only married local women. Jiajia was shocked to discover a complete lack of dance or musical activity in Laoyaoshan, and lamented the fact that elders at the time thought it was inappropriate to dance, whereas dancing was a part of everyday life in her Liangshan hometown. When people think about the elements that make a “traditional” ethnic minority society, singing and dancing is likely a large component. Ironically, several years ago the Laoyaoshan community was considered by other Yi to be exceptionally traditional in the sense that they did not approve of singing and dancing, or at least they did not feel that it was a vital component that could positively contribute to their societal life. Whenever Jiajia would ask the elders why they did not want her to dance, they would simply say “we can’t,” or they would respond by saying “in Laoyaoshan, we only sing nyop nyop hxo,” a Nuosu-specific style of folk singing passed on through generations.

Jiajia recalls how skeptical the Laoyaoshan people were with all things “foreign” when she first arrived. Even though she herself was a Nuosu Yi of the same caste, the fact that she came from somewhere other than Laoyaoshan meant that she was an outsider who couldn’t possibly know what was best for their group. Such instances of internal skepticism echo Jane Sugarman’s experience with the Prespa Albanians. When women from the same ethnic group and tribe move to a new locale they will likely face scrutiny upon arrival; it takes time to build report and not be viewed as an outsider. The
first time the community went to Qiaotou to buy food and supplies, Jiajia recalls how they all would bring their own food with them from Laoyaoshan for lunch, convinced that the food in Qiaotou restaurants would be poisoned. It was not until after they observed Jiajia eat a noodle dish several times that any of them would dare to try the food. Jiajia was also the first person to use a skillet to fry food, before that all the Laoyaoshan people only prepared dishes in the form of soups. She was also the first person to buy a table to eat on, and is still the only one to have dishes other than bowls.\textsuperscript{18}

The point of these depictions is to illustrate the extent to which Laoyaoshan is still a highly conservative area that largely rejects all things foreign or new, even if what’s being imported is itself a Nuosu cultural tradition. Indeed, members of Laoyaoshan thought dancing was an activity only Han could partake in, and it was not until they saw DVDs of Nuosu in Dali dancing following Laoyaoshan’s 2011 Huobajie that they could consider changing their attitude towards adopting songs and dances from external sources.

To this extent, the current state of everyday musical performance in Laoyaoshan is extremely scarce, and there are several additional factors contributing to its limitation. A large majority of the male youth attends school outside of the village, and may only come home for two to three months (cumulatively) out of the year. With the youth population being so dispersed, many of the household and field chores are left up to the females, adults, and elders in the village to manage and maintain. In addition, the Yi consider dance and general music making to be a youthful activity, and most elders would consider it taboo if a married woman were to partake in the dance activities despite youthful encouragement for collective participation.\textsuperscript{19} Laoyaoshan is also a poor, and remote area with infrequent access to neighboring towns. In this sense, both monetary
and natural materials available to purchase or construct the instruments are likewise scarce. Finally, there is also a lack of knowledgeable Yi musical practitioners in the area, making transmission to the next generations that much more difficult. In sum, there is limited access to resources, time, people, and knowledge about the Yi musical traditions in general, and it is my understanding that everyday musical practice is not in abundance.

However, these limitations are not unnoticed by the Yi in Laoyaoshan, and as a result great emphasis is placed on the musical activities of Huobajie as an annual representation and display of the continued local musical and cultural values and traditions. In fact, the concerns over potential cultural and musical loss are so evident that in 2011 Laoyaoshan residents contemplated how to best instill the dance movements and meanings into the memory of the young dancers. In order to facilitate the musical learning and transmission process, last year the female youth began learning and practicing the dances on July 10th, twelve days prior to the festival activities. To this extent, residents in Laoyaoshan consider the current duration of Huobajie to last fifteen days, four times longer than the usual three-day length recognized in most Yi areas.

Although musical performance is not abundant in Laoyaoshan, Yi popular music can be heard as cell phone ringtones, or seen on VCD players in Yi homes. Generally speaking, the Yi in Laoyaoshan would rather watch and listen to the Yi music VCDs than watch television shows if they have the capability. All of the popular Yi pop stars in circulation are from Liangshan, and all perform songs with lyrics in the Yi language (Shynra dialect) and Mandarin. Even though most Yi are not literate in Yi script, the music videos with Yi lyrics also include subtitles with the Yi characters. Most videos portray scenes of the open country, grasslands, fire, Nuosu people of all generations,
goats and cows, and various scenes where the lead performer(s) is either wearing traditional Nuosu clothing or modern Han/Western style clothing.

With the introduction of amplification technology to Laoyaoshan’s Huobajie in 2011, minority pop songs written and recorded within the past decade are the primary medium for dance accompaniment. One of the first major Yi bands to emerge from Liangshan was Yiren Zhizao (彝人制造), a male trio who gained popularity with their rendition of a well-known Yi folk song “July Huobajie (七月火把节).” Since the song’s release, “July Huobajie” has become the quintessential song associated with the festival, to the point where several different dance troupes feel inspired to use the song as their accompaniment for the annual competition. Other well-known Yi pop songs commonly accompany the dancers, such as male singer Ji Di Kangshi’s recording of the drinking song “I Don’t Care Whether You Want to Drink or Not (管你想喝不想喝).” The 2011 release of female Yi pop singer Hai Lai A Zhuo’s album and VCD entitled “Older Sister (姐姐)” is gaining popularity amongst the Yi in Laoyaoshan, and features a track entitled “Gesaluo (格萨啰)” that was used in the Laoyaoshan Huobajie 2012 performance.

(vi) Theorizing Musical Change in Laoyaoshan

The field of ethnomusicology’s conceptual framework for thinking about and analyzing musical change stems largely from Alan Merriam’s discussions in the landmark publication The Anthropology of Music. Merriam asserts that the process of musical change is a reflection of conceptual shifts within a culture. According to Merriam, the process of musical change has three major components, beginning with a conceptual
change within a cultural group, followed by some degree of behavioral response, ultimately resulting in a change to the product - the sound of the music itself. Merriam then describes the process of determining whether a musical change is viewed as being accepted or rejected by the cultural group:

The effect, however, has an effect on the listener, who judges both the competence of the performer and the correctness of his performance in terms of conceptual values. Thus if both the listener and the performer judge the product to be successful in terms of the cultural criteria for music, the concepts about music are reinforced, reapplied to behavior, and emerge as sound. If the judgment is negative, however, concepts must be changed in order to alter the behavior and produce different sound which the performer hopes will accord more closely with judgments of what is considered proper to music in the culture. Thus there is a constant feedback from the product to the concepts about music, and this is what accounts both for change and stability in a music system.23

The source of musical change in a culture is determined by two major classifications: internal and external. Internally derived musical changes are those that are implemented solely within a cultural group, and accepted by a majority of members of that group as appropriately representative of the group's musical and cultural values and preferences. Externally derived musical changes are those that emerge as a result of contact with an exterior group. Whether or not externally derived changes to music were forced or inspirational in nature is a significant point of departure, and one that shapes the entire cultural context and meaning of the music being performed. Stokes recalls one point of enduring interest for ethnomusicologists in relation to instance of cultural contact, namely "the gradual musical changes that come about in small-scale, isolated communities as they are absorbed into wider political entities."24 Stokes then refers to
Herzog’s studies on the North American Indians\textsuperscript{25} as an exemplary study of this process, and the same certainly seems to be true to some extent amongst the various Yi groups in China.

Most instances of documented musical change are those that resulted from an internal decision-making process, and thus distinctions that would form a subgroup within the category of externally derived musical change are few. In fact, some scholars argue that all analysis related to musical change should be entirely internal in nature. For example, in her article \textit{Toward Evaluating Musical Change Through Musical Potential}, Marcia Herndon states: “It is assumed that the focus of an investigation of musical change should be internal, rather than external; external factors and events may inform, but should not direct, the analysis.”\textsuperscript{26} Herndon is correct in asserting that the researcher should focus on factors related to the specific cultural group, not allowing the analysis to be convoluted with hypotheses concerning an exterior force, but rather focus on the internal motivations and behaviors of that primary cultural group. However, in instances where two or more cultural groups are involved in the decision-making process such as the case of the 2011 Huobajie in Laoyaoshan, neglecting to equally or even partially investigate the role and intention of an external group’s involvement would only lead to an incomplete interpretation of the musical change process. Moreover, the analysis would not be able to account for why specific elements of the group’s music changed, nor would it be able to explain the process of negotiation and corresponding conceptual shifts that would need to take place to make such changes occur.

Although far more instances of internally derived musical change exist than externally derived changes [Chapter V, section (iii)], researchers in the field of
ethnomusicology should not dismiss external features as merely additive. All types of factors could be relevant for affecting the conscious of individuals and groups, both internal and external. The idea that conscious efforts and viewing cultural phenomena as stemming from a decision-making process is known as the generative approach. In instances where two or more groups are involved in decision-making processes, perhaps researchers should strive to take a more comprehensive approach, examining the various external influences in order to more accurately measure how and why internal conceptual, behavioral, and musical changes occurred. Scholars Tim Rice and David Harnish likewise acknowledge changes in ethnomusicology research approach and methodology:

The field has shifted from an objectivist/positivist context to one in which many scholars avoid “undifferentiated” authors, explore “tension, strain, and contestation” among differing “subject positions,” and analyze “shifting temporal, social, and cultural bases” of musical experience.

Furthermore, a more in-depth and informative approach to ethnography is one that continues to move away from a normative theory lens that is primarily concerned with collecting data, and instead engages with the cultural group more intimately by utilizing ideational methods. While questioning the analytical methods of understanding and describing myth in relation to culture, ethnomusicology scholar Steven Feld states, “Geertz and others have similarly pointed out the fallacy of assuming the meaning of things to be solely in their arrangement, rather than in the relations between their arrangement and objects, actions, and thoughts in lived worlds.”

When it comes to evaluating externally derived musical change, what terminology do ethnomusicology scholars currently utilize to distinguish various scenarios? Merriam
ascribes two terms to instances of significant musical change in any given culture: reinterpretation, and syncretism. He defines reinterpretation as “the process by which old meanings are ascribed to new elements or by which new values change the cultural significance of old forms.” Syncretism, the more extreme of the two forms, is defined as “specifically that process through which elements of two or more cultures are blended together; this involves both changes of value and of form.”

A third category of externally derived musical change is when an outside group introduces new musical genres, forms, instruments, or other factors that affect the overall soundscape of a culture’s musical performance. In 2011, Han officials from Qiaotou introduced new technology and a new repertoire; specifically microphones, amplifiers, and Tibetan pop songs, to the Laoyaoshan’s Huobajie performance. For an area with little to no daily musical life (with the exception of nyop nyop hxo), these newly implemented changes had a significant impact on the Nuosu in Laoyaoshan, who later had to negotiate amongst themselves to determine what elements of the 2011 performance were expectable for continuity in 2012. The analysis for this decision-making process is present throughout this thesis in various sections, suffice it to say that the introduction of new musical elements by an external, albeit dominant force, led to a new discourse concerning agency and control over festival activities and music as a representation of Nuosu Yi identity.
Chapter II: Nuosu Customs and Issues of Ethnicity

(i) Summary of Nuosu Yi History and Societal Structure

According to the Tabulation on Nationalities of 2000 Population Census of China, the Yi are the seventh-largest minority group in China, with nearly eight million people registered under the "Yi" ethnicity category. The Yi are believed to be descendants of the Qiang people from northwest China, and are related to the Tibetan-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family, also known as Northern Ngwi. Although the Yi maintain their own distinctive written script form separate from Mandarin, there are also six mutually unintelligible dialects within the Yi language category. The diverse Yi groups are broadly distinguished at the provincial level, namely Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi Yi. This study focuses on the Nuosu Yi located in northeast Yunnan Province, those who migrated from the Liangshan region in Sichuan Province during the twentieth century and speak the Shynra dialect of the Yi language.

The earliest Yi migrations into the Liangshan region are believed to have taken place between the Han and early Tang dynasties (206 B.C.- 907 A.D), followed by a migration further southwest to the Ninglang (宁蒗) region (near Lijiang, Yunnan Province) by 1820. Those earliest migrants to the Liangshan region claimed elite status as they subjugated natives, gradually developing a class-based society. However, apart from the Nuosu and other Yi groups in the northern regions, most of the varied people falling under the southern Yi category spread throughout Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi Provinces have "been under state rule for centuries," and therefore never developed a caste-based society, nor did they take neighboring Han inhabitants as slaves like the
northern Yi groups. 34 The northern Yi continued their societal caste system until 1956, when the PRC instituted “Democratic Reforms” in order to abolish Nuosu “slave society” and promote socialist modernization. 35 The castes included (from highest to lowest) the nzymo, nuoho, quho, mgajie, and gaxy classes. In current discourse there is a distinction between “black” Yi and “white” Yi, with the black Yi comprising of the elite nzymo and nuoho descendents, while the white Yi include the quho, mgajie, and gaxy classes. 36 The Nuosu Yi branch are descendants of the nuoho branch, and are currently the most populace subgroup within the Yi category.

Mongol leaders during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) are well known for having implemented the tusi system, which gave external political power to existing local leaders, who at that time were members of the nzymo class. 37 The term for the elite nzymo class means “one who wields power,”—it is not surprising that they would become the representative tusi of the region. Because the nzymo held the highest status, it is also not surprising that the earliest and most famous Liangshan Nuosu-language literature focuses on the nzymo class. Such texts include: the Hnewo teyy (The Book of Origins), recounting the origin of heaven, earth, and early migrations of the Yi people; the Vonre (The Snow Clan), a collection of orally transmitted stories describing the origin of humanity, genealogies, and migrations of Yi clans; the Hxoyi Ddiggur, and the Gamo Anyop, named after their heroic protagonists, the latter focuses on a tragic heroine of which many Liangshan folksongs are based. 38

While the content of the previous texts are valuable in their reference to famous Yi beliefs, events, and heroes, perhaps the most important element is the contents’ promotion of nzymo elitism. The caste system, with the nzymo making up a minority of
the Yi population, was a harsh means of facilitating class and status differentiation. The struggle for power led to frequent contention amongst the classes, especially between the nuoho and nzymo, and amongst the nuoho themselves. Tension peaked during the Yongzhen period (1722) with the government attempt to replace (Yi) tusi leaders with (Han) bureaucrat leaders. However, the officials abandoned the cause in 1776, driven out by frequent nuoho riots opposing both foreign presence, and the nzymo’s increasing adherence to Chinese political strategies.39

Despite the nzymo and nuoho inner-group battles mentioned above, an important consideration is that such struggles were fundamentally “Yi” in nature, exemplifying proud resistance to outside, albeit dominate political influences. One can see how the majority of Nuosu Yi proverbs and historical accounts focus on nzymo and nuoho relations in Liangshan. Belonging to one of these two classes meant having a higher status than the quho, who are largely grouped into the “white” Yi category separate from the “black” Nuosu, and the gaxy (mostly Han) slave class. Although the lines of differentiation have been blurred since the minority classification project [see Chapter 2, section (v)], it is clear that the Nuosu have historically thought of themselves in hierarchal categories based within this embedded framework of group, clan, and class differentiation. The Yi caste system is thus a not-so-far-removed status symbol, and claiming that one is a Nuosu from Liangshan (therefore most likely a nuoho descendant) implies having a relatively elite status in Yi society.

However, the caste system was not the only means of establishing one’s status within the Nuosu community. Each community had suyy and suga, wealthy elite who acquired high status through their diligent work abilities and strong clan connections.
Warfare, wrestling, and acts of bravery were highly revered in Nuosu society, and such outstanding warriors and militant experts were known as *ssako* - the brave ones. The Nuosu also practiced their own legal proceedings and bylaws for crimes or disputes, and punishments were largely determined by the hierarchical class relationship of those involved. To help guide the judicial process, some Nuosu community members were deemed *ndeggu*, wise mediators whose impartial judgment helped solve disputes. With the exception of women and the *gaxy* slaves, these positions could be delegated to members of all other caste or clan background, and in this way an individual could achieve higher social prestige based on his own abilities and commitment to bettering the community.

Kinship is an intricate and vital component to Yi self and group understanding in societal structure. While the caste system functioned as an initial, broad category of Yi status identification, one’s clan and familial genealogy continues to serve as an intimate, specific level of identification on a personal level. As Harrell illustrates, “the core of Nuosu society is patrilineal clan, or *cyvi,”* and “when two Nuosu strangers meet, they immediately ascertain each other’s clan and place of residence” by reciting their genealogies. Maintaining intimate clan ties and understanding is still an avid part of Nuosu identity, and young men still learn to sing the orally transmitted “praise songs” of their clan. Nuosu Yi names are typically made up of three levels of organization, beginning with one’s clan name, followed by one’s birth-order name (such as *Amu* “first eldest brother”, or *Aga* “second eldest sister”), and ending with a two-syllable personal name. The personal names usually depict an animal, such as *Sheep* (*Yo*); a terrain, such as *Cliff* (*Va*); or an element, such as *Silver* (*Qu*). Two of these meanings are then
combined to form the personal name, resulting in a full name like Bamo Aga YoQu (interpreted as Silver Sheep Second eldest sister of the Bamo clan).

Just as marrying outside of one’s caste was forbidden, marrying outside of one’s clan was also heavily discouraged, even to the point of where some lovers would be “compelled by customary law to commit suicide as a penalty for their indiscretion.” The Yi have a long-standing history of practicing bilateral-cross-cousin marriage customs in order to create and strengthen local alliances. To this degree, Harrell further attests that “there are immediate and absolute bonds of attachment between two clan-mates that override either local or affinal ties, and for many people these extend clear across Liangshan.” Because local alliances and familial/clan bonds were so interrelated, the inner-caste warfare mentioned in the previous section may be less surprising; business was often intimately personal. Laoyaoshan is comprised entirely of Nuosu Yi, descendants of the nuoho, and the aforementioned background information continues to preside in the minds of the Laoyaoshan people in terms of how they perceive themselves in relation to others both internally and externally.

(ii) Nuosu Religious Beliefs and Customs

The Huobajie event in Laoyaoshan serves many religious functions for the Nuosu Yi (see Chapter III, section (iv). This section serves to give a general overview of Nuosu Yi customs and beliefs to familiarize the reader with their religious structure prior to the analysis. Nuosu religious practice is essentially animist in nature, worshipping ancestral spirits and those associated with natural elements, along with some Daoist influence as well. Apart from the belief that dragons protect villages against evil spirits, the tiger is
the most revered animal in Yi religious belief, with different parts of the tiger’s body personified cosmologically. For example, the head of the tiger is the head of Heaven, the tail is the tail of earth, the tiger’s fat is the clouds, the left eye is the sun, the right eye is the moon, the blood is the ocean, the skin is the earth’s crust. Originally, the Yi also had a solar calendar comprised of ten months, each of which has 36 days, with New Year’s and Huobajie adding a sort of neutral 5-6 days to accumulate the 365-day total. Similar to Daoism, each of these months represents one of the five elements (wuxing), earth, copper, water, wood, and fire, and each month alternates between male and female character. Therefore the first month is earth-male, the second is earth-female, etc. Although Huobajie falls into the neutral-day category, the month leading up to the event is the fire-male month.

The Nuosu believe in two worlds, the “immediate material world” of reality, which humans are a part of during life, and the world of the afterlife, where ghosts of deceased Yi join their ancestors. It is believed that the world of the afterlife functions very much like the world of the living, there is a hierarchical society, bureaucrats, and taxes. Respecting one’s ancestors is of utmost importance, for the ghost of a deceased family member could come back to vengefully wreak havoc on the surviving family members or neighbors if the body and soul of the deceased does not go through the proper burial procedures. Religious ceremonies are not only preventative in nature, but when disaster does strike a community there is meticulous protocol to determine the most appropriate exorcism ritual to be conducted. In extreme circumstances of injustice, the Nuosu also curse those who have wronged them.
To ensure these complicated religious rituals can be performed successfully, the Nuosu Yi have professional priests and religious specialists known as bimo. Until recent decades, the bimo were the only citizens literate in written Yi script, and were thus the most knowledgeable in Yi communities on subjects of history, legends, and tracing recorded genealogical lineages. Additionally, the bimo recite ritual texts to exorcise ghosts, provide offerings to benefit the living and the spirits of the deceased, and to guarantee that one’s spirit will peacefully rise into the world of the ancestors in the afterlife. The genealogical records found in the book Bipu indicate that the bimo profession has been formally established for approximately 2,500 years. 50

There is a distinction between bimo who are appointed through hereditary orthodox succession (bicy bimosse), and those who acquire knowledge as an apprentice. The latter are also known as “those practicing an inappropriate craft” or “uncategorizable people” (zzybi). This distinction functions at the practical level, as the zzybi are unable to conduct the most elaborate rituals that directly affect the soul. Although the zzybi may not be able to conduct these rituals themselves, in recent years some apprentices’ knowledge of formal ritual procedures actually surpasses that of the orthodox bimo. A final distinction is made between the high-road bimo (gahxa bimo) and low-road bimo (gajjy bimo). The only difference between the two is that the high-road bimo can perform the rituals for those with children who died of illnesses such as leprosy or consumptive tuberculoses, and those who died untimely deaths. Unless performed properly, the souls of these deceased may not enter the world of the ancestors, and thus could remain in this world as wild ghosts. Low-road bimo can likewise cast spells, expel ghosts, defend or
counter ghosts and spells, and determine auspicious dates and terrain for important
events.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{(iii) Nuosu Yi Music, Instruments, and Dance}

The Nuosu have many varieties of distinctive instruments, many of which are
elaborately decorated in a painting style similar to their lacquerware, or include clan or
locale-specific designs. The most commonly found instruments include the four-stringed
plucked lute (sixian or pambie), the bamboo reed aerophone (mabur), the end-blown flute
(juhr), the panpipes (bbusse), the two-stringed fiddle (erxian or fusse), the metal or
bamboo mouth harp (kouxian or hxohxo), and the leaf (yezi or syrqi hmo). Nuosu
indigenous scholar Bamo Qubumo writes regarding the general attitude towards music in
Nuosu society:

Folk music is a traditional means of expression and interaction, of
expressing feelings of joy and sorrow, and of transmitting the
sounds of the soul. Nuosu people love music, which to them is like
"the swift horse to the expert rider, or the spindle to the young
maiden." In any Nuosu village you will find the sound of music;
every young woman has a mouth-harp hanging around her neck,
and young men often let their lutes speak for them. A witty elder
will gain glory by showing how he can lift a lute from his back and
play tunes over his head; a toothless old granny will take a mouth­
harp away from nearby girls and play a couple of tunes; and little
ones just learning to talk will begin to learn to play by imitating
their elders.\textsuperscript{52}

Bamo writes of an avid, lively musical environment in which all generations participate
in a mutual understanding of a shared traditional musical culture. She even casually
attests to a natural process of oral transmission, and the importance of involving and
encouraging children to participate in music from a very young age.
The Yi have an understanding that music is much more than just mere entertainment; it is an intimate and distinctive form of expression that unites their society and carries on the traditions and values that they have maintained and advocated for generations. The website www.yizure.com is a multilingual, frequently updated site with abundant resources on topics related to Yi news, culture, and society. One link describes the importance of folk song in Yi society:

Yi folk song lyrical content is vast, and is one of the prime sources of Yi-created literature. In traditional Yi society, they often formed an explanation and promotion of history, stressed Yi morals, passed on customs to younger generations, and expressed love, happiness, anger, grief and joy—the gamut of human feelings. In fact, the tunes were determined according to the lyrical content, or graceful euphemisms, or modulations and cadences, or warm melodies, using art’s influential power to the extreme. These categories further constituted narrative songs, courtship songs, songs of tragedy, commoner songs, drinking songs, and songs displaying cultural custom among others. 53

Importantly, the above quotation implies that the mood of human emotions, feelings, and sentiments is what determines the melodic structure of Yi folk songs, rather than starting the composition process with a melody and later adding appropriate text.

Each of the aforementioned Nuosu instruments has distinctive playing styles and techniques, the general details of which are worth examining. The sixian or pambie four-stringed lute is constructed with walnut and yellow poplar wood, a raised bamboo fret board, and strings made of either horsehair, silk, or steel. The body of the four-stringed plucked lute is round, hexagonal, or octagonal in shape, and the head of the lute is carved and ornamented to form a dragonhead or other design.
The bamboo reed (mabur) is a single bamboo pipe with seven finger holes, and an ox or ram horn at the end to amplify the sound. Mabur players implement the circular breathing technique, thus they are able to play melodies in a continuously fluid manner. At the same time, players ornament with rapid fingering techniques, mimicking the sound of birds.

The leaf is perhaps the most commonly played instrument amongst the Yi, largely because of its accessibility and portability. A leaf approximately 3-5 inches is pinched and folded in a particular fashion, and placed partly in the mouth horizontally. One then blows into the leaf (the velocity of each exhale determines the dynamics), adjusting the mouth shape to alter the pitch. While learning the basics of how to create tones and play
simple melodies may be considered rudimentary, the more skilled leaf players can incorporate more advanced techniques of upper and lower harmonics, tremolo, and vibrato. In addition, the texture of the leaf also produces a distinct rattling sound when a player exhales with great force.

The Nuosu Yi mouth harp is an example of a "talking instrument," an extraordinary musical phenomenon in which the tones and rhythmic patterns emulate the tonal inflections and cadences of human speech. The Nuosu Yi play talking instruments to mimic the Yi language and more recently Mandarin Chinese tonal inflections. When playing the mouth harp, the Nuosu Yi are able to express internal feelings and emotions, engage in courtship affairs, perform shaman ritual activities such as ancestral communication, and depict past events (actual or fictitious) as a form of storytelling.

Figure 8. Jiajia playing the four-fanned mouth harp.
The mouth harps have small brass fans (three-five), each of which has a thin slit that vibrates when plucked. Meanwhile the player’s mouth acts as a resonator, so that altering the shape of the mouth and placement of the tongue changes the overtones of the notes produced, as well as the overall timbre. Breathing techniques are likewise implemented, allowing the instrument to produce a synthetic-like quality depending on the strength and length of each breath. Jiajia is the most proficient mouth harp player in Laoyaoshan, and plays both the three and four fanned mouth harps.

Dancing is the most commonly found musical practice in Yi culture, and just like the Yi themselves, the patterns and dance forms are quite diverse. Some of the more widely recognized dance forms include the Tobacco Box dance (烟盒舞), Luo zuo dance (罗作舞), the Dage or Stomp dance (打歌), and the Golden Bamboo dance (金竹舞). These dances are a custom of the southern Yunnan Yi groups, and therefore practiced mostly by the white Yi. These dance style features include relatively broad steps or stomps, with alternating left and right leg forward kicks roughly one metric foot above the ground. Occasionally the dancer will swiftly kick their right leg sideways to the dancer’s left at approximately a 180° at waist level.

The Nuosu dances in Laoyaoshan during Huobajie are derived from the same dance forms found in Liangshan and Dali. The dance forms performed in 2011 included the “Young Girl’s movements (姑娘的动作),” “Yak in the Pasture style (牦牛草原的风格),” and many renditions of “Huobajie dance forms (火把节的跳舞).” All of these dance movements are comparatively more reserved physically; that is to say the “kick” movements of the Laoyaoshan dances would perhaps better be referred to as “steps.” There is also very little upper-arm and shoulder movement compared to the white Yi
dance forms. In addition, the social custom exists in Laoyaoshan that women do not typically dance after they have had children. A more specific and detailed analysis will be presented in chapter 3, suffice it to say that the dance forms performed in Laoyaoshan differ significantly from the “Yi” dances presented at cultural tourist bureaus such as “Dynamic Yunnan: The Grand Original Native Song & Dance Medley.”

For the case of Laoyaoshan, a place that with the exception of nyop nyop hxo folk singing has a significant lack of everyday musical activity prior to 2010, the influential effect of newly introduced music to the region is profound. Referring back to the previous quote by Bamo Qubo, it appears that many Nuosu areas secure their cultural distinctiveness and continuity by harnessing avid and abundant musical practice on a daily basis. The concerns of the elder generation within the community regarding continuity of Nuosu cultural values is likely to continue carrying weight into the decision making process of what music is accepted as their own. As homogenizing pressures become more pervasive for the younger generation in Laoyaoshan, there is potential for increased frequency of musical performance in the area. The question is whether the change in repertoire and frequency will be internally or externally derived based on negotiation tactics and the resistance or acceptance amongst the Laoyaoshan Yi of newly introduced musical influences from the Han in Qiaotou or other Yi groups in neighboring regions.

(v) Recent Societal Changes Within Laoyaoshan
Residents in Laoyaoshan are facing similar challenges that are prevalent in rural minority communities throughout China in terms of trying to balance traditional cultural values with the external homogenizing pressures associated with objective of “development and progress.” There is a clear divergence in knowledge of Nuosu traditions and customs between Laoyaoshan adult residents and the youth generation (those approximately born in 1990 and after)? The state’s primary objective exemplify a gradual process of encouraging younger generations to deviate further and further away from their homes and Nuosu customs in order to promote ways of thinking and acting that align with the more dominant Han state objectives. The state accomplishes this objective by separating the Nuosu youth from their hometowns for extended periods of time, and promoting homogeneity through Han educational influence.

Until 2010, Laoyaoshan had its own primary school for local Nuosu children. The children of Laoyaoshan usually begin first grade around the age of seven, and complete primary school by age eleven or twelve. The Laoyaoshan primary school was walking distance for all students, making it possible to go to school during the day, and return home by late afternoon to help with household chores such as feeding the livestock or herding sheep and cattle. In 2008, the Qiaotou government mandated that the school be changed from having grades 1-5 to only including grades 1-3. This meant that instead of enrolling at Qiaotou for middle school at age twelve, the children would now have to go more than ten kilometers away to boarding school by age nine or ten, returning home only for winter and summer holidays. After two years of weaning younger students away from their home institution, the Qiaotou government permanently closed the school, requiring students to enroll and reside at Qiaotou primary school by grade 1. Currently,
the building is used as a meetinghouse for the local Nuosu and government officials, and can be identified by the PRC flag hoisted in the courtyard on the mountainside overlooking Qiaotou.

The Qiaotou primary and middle school is made up of a conglomerate of various ethnic groups, including Yi, Lisu, Lahu, Naxi, Tibetan, and Han. While the Yi language is still spoken at home in Laoyaoshan, in Qiaotou Mandarin is the main language written and spoken among the diverse group of students. My informants state that a clear preference for Han cultural values is present, with teachers frequently telling students "your Yi traditions are too old, if you believe in those legends and stories you will not develop properly," and "if you practice those ancient Yi customs you won’t be able to make money and improve the economy." Although Laoyaoshan students openly tell their parents of their teachers’ negative opinions regarding their culture, such comments seemed to have instilled at least some sense of hesitation amongst the younger generation to the point where they must contemplate the methods and contexts in which they will either stand by their collective Yi values, or accept the Han influences in hopes of accumulating individual occupational gain.

The decision to have Laoyaoshan residents go to Qiaotou boarding school at younger age means that negotiations of various types are likewise taking place at an earlier stage in Laoyaoshan Nuosu life. From the age of seven, many Laoyaoshan youth are faced with living a dual identity lifestyle. They travel to an urban environment and cultural context relatively far-removed from their hometown in which they have a limited opportunity to speak their primary language. After being raised by (Han) teachers and schoolmasters for several months at a time, they return home and live a life of difficult
manual labor, where they are fostered by an older generation that in many ways may seem “out of touch” with the Han concerns of social and economic development. There are expectations from the adult role models on both sides, and the youth of the 1990s generation and after have had to learn how to adapt their fluctuating surroundings, and negotiate their identity with their parents, their teachers, and themselves.

Less time at home means less time for parents to pass on culturally significant beliefs and practices. As mentioned previously, although the Yi have their own written script, in most areas the bimo priests are the only ones literate in Yi communities. Therefore, legends, oral histories, and musical practices are all transmitted orally, with the assumption that there would be a lifetime to accumulate knowledge of one’s cultural norms and customs. This process of oral transmission is being cut off, especially for male youth who pursue higher education or for the young adult professionals whose jobs are distant from their hometowns.

One night in mid-July 2012, I sat in one resident’s house along with several other Nuosu families (six adults, fourteen children). My principle informant, thirty-eight year-old widowed mother of three named Jiajia began playing her kouxian (mouth harp); the room fell silent as her friends and relatives listened intently. Although this was the first time most of the community had ever heard Jiajia play the kouxian, virtually all the adults present (over the age of twenty-eight and younger than forty) were able to understand what Jiajia was saying while playing the kouxian, as well as the basic structure and playing style. On the other hand, of all the youth present (the oldest of which was fifteen), not a single one could discern what was being said, nor were they familiar with the general significance of the kouxian to Nuosu culture. This casual gathering amongst
friends exemplified the striking contrast between generations in relation to a cultural practice that was once an avid part of everyday life for Nuosu Yi of all ages.

The recent temporal and spatial separation of Nuosu youth from their families in Laoyaoshan is already having detrimental effects on the cultural and musical transmission process. With only a limited time of having their children home, the older generation of Nuosu are faced with adjusting to a new form of time management— one that can instill or re-instill cultural values and beliefs while still adhering to the demands of manual labor. Fearing extinction, there is a growing sense of urgency in the Laoyaoshan community to pass on Nuosu traditions to the younger generation. To this extent, opportunities for performing cultural practices are more highly valued than years prior, and Huobajie is one such opportunity that both reifies Nuosu traditions within the Laoyaoshan community, while also displaying its continuity to outside observers.

Within this context exists a constant dialogue between three major actors: the older generation of Laoyaoshan who advocate for the continuity of Nuosu cultural beliefs and practices, the teachers and government officials promoting a Han-centric worldview that contradicts the Nuosu elders’ viewpoints, and the younger Laoyaoshan generation who study in Qiaotou and must learn to adjust their habits to fit both environments. Huobajie is the only time where all three major actors converge in the same place at the same time. Thus the conditions under which the festival is carried out—along with the details of the musical repertoire and performance—are crucially important for determining what is at stake for each actor individually, and the risks and rewards of making concessions to policy goals or cultural beliefs. Moreover, in Laoyaoshan Huobajie is much more than just a music and culture festival; it is the one chance of the year for each
actor to be able to determine changing aspects of control and influence amongst the youth within Laoyaoshan society, and by engaging in and witnessing their musical performance it is the prime opportunity for the Yi to self-evaluate their own strategy’s successes or failures based on the aspiration of cultural value continuity as they see fit.

(vi) Ways of Maintaining Ethnic Identity

The pressure for the Nuosu Yi in Laoyaoshan to modernize and homogenize to Han standards of development is intensifying, and as a result the Laoyaoshan community is strategizing to find ways to live and maintain their ethnic identity while still adhering to the political powers in Qiaotou. Many of the issues mentioned in section (v) concerning Han educational influence and extended periods of separation of children from their home villages depict a similar process that has been occurring throughout Liangshan since the 1990s. I believe that to an extent, the Liangshan Yi’s approach to the external political policy changes could potentially be viewed as a role model for smaller areas such Laoyaoshan who are facing the reality of these social changes for the first time. The beginning of this section will discuss the process and examine ways in which areas of Liangshan have adapted to such policy changes while maintaining their ethnic distinctiveness, followed by a more detailed account of the strategies implemented in Laoyaoshan.

When the PRC was instated in 1949, one of the major agendas for Mao and the Party was to determine the boundaries of the nation-state. The Communist project was conducted largely on the basis of Stalin’s four characteristics of a nationality (common territory, language, economy, and psychological nature). One of project’s professed
goals, on the surface at least, was not so much an effort to assimilate minority peoples to Han customs, as it was an effort to bring the peripheral peoples “to a universal standard of progress or modernity.” This of course meant, however, that any cultural practices contradicting this endeavor would have to be eliminated—hence the abandonment of the Yi caste system in 1956.57

The results of a preliminary 1952 census proved that a one-way state-supposed classification based on the Stalinist principles was in effect an over-simplification of the task at hand. As historians, linguists, and ethnographers began investigating ethnic groups more closely in 1954, minority groups treated the interview process in a dialogic sense, seeking to explain and display their group distinctiveness in hopes of attaining individual categorization and representation on the state level.58 What remains unclear, however, is the level of engagement these scholars had in negotiating with various minority groups. In Yunnan, and surely in Liangshan as well, many potential cites where minority groups lived were inaccessible by car, and thus ignored altogether; the state chose which sites to survey. The short duration of time allotted for actual field research categorization (3-6 months) likewise encouraged rapid conglomeration of various, potentially unrelated groups.59

How have the Liangshan Yi adjusted to such a dramatic shift? Within the past two decades, the vast majority of Western scholarly writings and ethnographies about the Nuosu Yi take place in Liangshan, such as the works of Steven Harrell and Mark Bender. In many cases, the Yi authors themselves were born and raised in the Liangshan region, like Puyong Guang and Zhu Wenxu. Liangshan Yi scholar Puyong Guang asserts that because of Liangshan’s high population of Nuosu, its long history, and its relative
isolation, there has been a revival of Liangshan research since the 1980s reform (gaige kaifang). But what are some of the educational strategies in Liangshan that have allowed and encouraged students to pursue further education? Like other aspects of culture, education cannot be generalized, as most styles and policies are different from township to township. With an increasing Han population, some schools teach entirely in Mandarin, whereas other schools teach in Nuosu and/or Mandarin depending on the subject matter of the course.

As Harrell observes, Xide County primary schools focus on bilingual teaching methods until the middle school level. Additionally, students participate in a Yi language course, which mainly consists of reading and interpreting classic Yi texts, poems, and lessons that are culturally Yi-specific. The example Harrell provides gives testament to how the use of Nuosu Yi language in an institutionalized education system can reify Yi distinctiveness, as the students learn the Han-implemented course requirements literally in their own terms. Harrell also points out that the duration of time that villages and townships have included Mandarin in their teaching strategies reflects the overall level of Han literacy in those areas; the longer a school has incorporated Han language strategies, the higher the literacy rate of that associated region. Though on the surface this may be a moot point, literacy in Mandarin is likewise linked to economics, mobility, and the aforementioned Han notion of progress and modernity. The Yi recognize this fact, of course, as Harrell explains:

Even here near the heart of Liangshan, where the government is making a huge effort to promote Nuosu as a language of schooling, bureaucracy, and mass media, the real route to success outside the tiny confines of Mishi lies in learning the Han language. This is
why bilingual education is being relegated by Nuosu educational bureaucrats to the four most remote townships in all of Xide.63

Importantly, the Nuosu school officials recognize that even relative isolation from the Han is a distant memory. They therefore integrate Mandarin language strategies to adhere to the broad state standards, without neglecting the essential and familiar Nuosu values.

Such innovative strategies could explain why many Yi scholars are coming from the Liangshan region, but how are these scholars then continuing to promote Liangshan as an important area of Yi history, culture, and society? The immediate answer is simply that producing more sources on the topic increases exposure to the environment, and deepens researcher's attention to more specific subject matter related to genealogy, ritual, and folklore on the microscopic level of analysis.64 Some schools are also becoming influenced by Yi revisionist history strategies. Much of Yi revisionist historical writings are attempts at dispelling Han hypotheses concerning Yi origin and migration patterns. The is perhaps because the "true" place of Yi origin is so contestable: Han claim Yi migrated from the northern Qinghai/Tibet Autonomous region boarder while Yi claim origin in Yunnan province.65 Yi select a more immediately traceable, and thus reliable place of ancestral origin based on kinship, such as Liangshan.

Regardless of who is right or wrong, an important fact is that Yi revisionist scholarship in particular, headed by Yi scholar Liu Yaohan at the Yi Culture School in Yunnan, is largely a product of Yi scholars from Yunnan and Guizhou, separate from the Nuosu of Liangshan. The writings have, however, gained prominent appeal in Liangshan, as scholar Ashuo Keha states:

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We people of Liangshan, particularly those who understand both Yi and Han written languages, should be just like Professor Liu and excavate and research our precious Yi culture, emphasizing that only in this way will our Chinese culture (Zhonghua wenhua) be able to face its ancestors and hold up its head before it’s children and grandchildren.⁶⁶

Even in the brief quotation above, we see yet again the vital role of kinship and ancestry at work. This collective duty extends beyond the benefits of the individual; the perpetuation of Yi culture in scholarly discourse is a recent method of honoring and bringing pride to one’s clan and ancestors.

Although the majority of Yi revisionist scholarship is taking place in regions other than Liangshan, the information is nevertheless spreading within the region. What is unique about the Liangshan education system is its adamancy for formal Yi spoken and written language study in addition to Mandarin and other courses. Such practices of cultural maintenance and continuity make the Nuosu of the Liangshan region especially well informed when it comes to what constitutes the somewhat-standardized Yi legends, history, religious and cultural norms and beliefs. Liangshan’s attention to cultural maintenance in recent years has led to what Puyong describes as an increase in college/university students from the Liangshan region majoring in minority studies, resulting in an abundance of local research on cultural topics.⁶⁷

The Liangshan education system can act as a model for other Yi groups further removed from that area, like Laoyaoshan, where students are becoming inculcated into an all-Han curriculum and requisite for higher education. As of 2012, three people from Laoyaoshan have gone to college, one of whom has become a prominent doctor in Kunming and is allegedly well known throughout Yunnan Province. In 2009, the Qiaotou
government began giving Laoyaoshan families televisions, transmitters, and/or satellites to provide the children with a method for hearing and learning Mandarin at an earlier age. With the exception of a television that may be broadcasting in Mandarin, the Nuosu in Laoyaoshan speak the Yi language entirely. In fact, many of the Yi there over the age of fifty speak and understand very little Mandarin, if any at all. Still, the recent addition of television allows for constant access to the Han language, culture, and way of thinking, features which will likely be manifested amongst the youngest generation of bilingual and bicultural Nuosu in Laoyaoshan.

Another major way the Nuosu in Liangshan and Laoyaoshan maintain their sense of ethnicity is through the practice of not providing education for the girls and young women in their community. Most children in Laoyaoshan, both male and female, begin primary school at age seven, and continue until graduating middle school at age thirteen or fourteen. Despite their test scores, grades, or perceived academic capabilities, males are encouraged to continue studying through high school. On the other hand, continued education for women is rare and even discouraged unless she has achieved exceptionally high test scores or is especially adamant about pursuing higher education. Although Jiajia displayed obvious intellect and verbally expressed a strong desire to attend (primary) school at a young age, her father deemed it “untraditional” for a female to be educated, and therefore denied her the opportunity to formally study at an institution. Others in Laoyaoshan likewise maintain this viewpoint, and there are some cases where, like Jiajia, females are never given the opportunity to study even at the primary level.

Along with the belief that maintaining household chores is a woman’s responsibility, arranged marriage is a key factor contributing to the reason why females
are less likely to pursue higher education. In Laoyaoshan, most marriages are negotiated and decided upon by a child’s parents as early as age four or five. Although marriages are decided at a young age, the identity of one’s bride or husband to be is usually concealed until the marriage ceremony itself, where the bride removes her *hifu* or *hlimbo* (embroidered head covering) and her identity is revealed. Marriages in Laoyaoshan usually take place when the male or female turns seventeen, and it is typical for the male to be the same age or older than his bride.

Laoyaoshan residents believe the cultural practice of arranged marriage instills a sense of security and stability for Yi families; it is a method that also determines where a Yi youth will reside and with whom they will have a family. The certainty of one’s future is definite, which in turn perpetuates a resistance to marrying someone who is not Nuosu. Additionally, from the perspective of parents and elders in Laoyaoshan, arranged marriage ensures that the newlyweds are prepared to have children, and will therefore raise the next generation in accordance with the elders’ supervision of what is ultimately best for the future of the Nuosu people in Laoyaoshan.

Another important means for maintaining ethnic distinctiveness is through musical performance, wearing Nuosu clothing patterns, and making handicrafts. These activities and materials function as signifiers of Nuosu culture, all of which are still present in various forms in Laoyaoshan. Harrell contemplates the surprising lack of traditional wear in Mishi County in Liangshan, an entirely Nuosu region, which is worth quoting at length:

*Ethnic markers such as dress, food, and housing have very little salience in the Mishi area, because everybody is Nuosu... I was astonished when I first arrived in Mishi that women did not wear*
Nuosu-style skirts or fancy jackets except for special occasions . . . for the most part, in the town and in the villages, they went about in the usual trousers and tops of ordinary Chinese rural women, with only the embroidered head-cloth tied down by the long braids of the young women, and the black high-framed headdress on the mothers and grandmothers, distinguishing the village women from what Han peasant women would look like there were any in the area, and not even that on many of the town women who worked in the government agencies. I asked all sorts of people why women did not wear Nuosu clothes for everyday wear here, as they did in Yanyuan and other areas, and the uniform answer was that such clothes were inconvenient for field and farm work. True enough, but presumably they are just as inconvenient, for example, for the road-building crews I saw in Malong and Guabie, which included women in pleated skirts. I think the real answer may be that there is no need for ethnic clothing to serve as an ethnic marker here, since everyone is Nuosu. Thus elaborate clothing can be saved for dress-up.

As mentioned previously, Yi make up 100% of the population in Laoyaoshan, with no Han or other minority group present. While it is true that males in Laoyaoshan do not typically wear Nuosu clothing except for special occasions, many of the married/adult women wear the pleated skirts, embroidered jackets, and elaborate headgear nearly everyday, regardless of any inconvenience it may pose while working in the fields. Seeing unmarried girls wearing their skirts and hats on an everyday basis is less common, but at least some articles of clothing are likely to be present on girls around the age of 14 and above. The scenario in Laoyaoshan therefore differs quite drastically from that of Harrell’s experience in Mishi, although the social conditions seem to be quite similar. As male resident Laosi stated during a casual dance gathering leading up to the 2012 Huobajie, “Look! Our young Laoyaoshan girls don’t look so good now because they are all wearing Han clothing, but just wait! On the day of Huobajie they will all be wearing our beautiful traditional Nuosu clothes – then they will look really great!”
In conclusion, there is a sense among adults in Laoyaoshan that wearing Nuosu clothing and speaking the Yi language almost exclusively is vital to maintaining a sense of identity. Based on my observations in Laoyaoshan, increasing acculturation is clearly a concern among the older generation more so now than in recent history. As the younger generation continues to become evermore inculcated into the Han education system in Qiaotou, adults in Laoyaoshan may consider new ways of instilling Nuosu beliefs and customs to the future generations in Laoyaoshan. Therefore, looking to other Nuosu groups like areas of Liangshan that have experienced similar issues could be an effective means for developing a strategy. The current generations of Laoyaoshan students that have potential to graduate high school within the decade (by 2020) are the largest in number and have the highest test scores to date. One such strategy for ensuring the inheritance of Nuosu customs and values among future generations could involve having a resident from Laoyaoshan work as an instructor at one of the public schools. Employing a Yi teacher who was brought up in Laoyaoshan or a neighboring region could help relieve some of the older generations’ concerns, especially if that instructor was permitted to teach speaking or writing the Yi language.
Chapter III: Contextualizing Huobajie

(i) History of Huobajie

In order to accurately discuss current Huobajie activities and beliefs, it is important to outline the historical discourse among indigenous scholars specializing on the topic. Thus, a brief description of the scholarly debates can clarify what Huobajie is or is not, and how this relates to the Huobajie in Laoyaoshan. The earliest written academic source on the subject of Huobajie is that of Xu Yinsu (1832-1901). Xu Yinsu’s work spawned a debate as to whether or not the Yi Xinghuijie (星回节), which takes place on the 24th day of the 12th month of the agricultural calendar, was actually the same as Huobajie, was takes place on the 24th day of the 6th month. In 1988, Yi scholar Nuo Hai A Su wrote “Yi Huobajie Origin and Xinghuijie”, in which he stated that at one time ancient Yi society implemented a six-month per year calendar cycle, and only later did they gradually develop the twelve-month per year cycle recognized today.

However, Nuosu Yi Huobajie scholar Zhu Wenxu definitively asserts that although ancient records spoke in terms of a “little year” comprised of six months, “Yi history and society has found no fundamental proof for six months being counted as one year.” Zhu’s primary argument for the Huobajie/Xinghuijie distinction is that Xinghuijie is considered to be a New Year’s festival with cultural practices that are completely absent and unrelated to Huobajie, such as danuo (exorcisms 大傩), the “revival of the country’s great enjoyment of the 12th month (苏农大享腊),” and an elaborate five-day ritual known as jizaoshen (sacrifice to the kitchen god 祭灶神).
Zhu is likewise careful to point out that there are many variants of Huobajie origin legends between Yi groups, and most of these have changed dramatically over time as they were orally transmitted. Zhu states, “although people have very ancient legends and stories, in reality the vast majority of these legends do not reflect the Huobajie’s true origins. These types of stories come from various times and vast audiences to express their personal morals, sentiments, and behaviors.” Indeed, Zhu even provides three completely different Huobajie legends from within the Liangshan region, none of which were recognized by residents in Laoyaoshan. Although there is no Huobajie origin story in Laoyaoshan, rituals such as “Ji A Ji” honor ancestors in the spirit world. In addition, there is a different god associated with each day of Huobajie, each of which has accompanying rituals and stories [expanded in sections (iii) and (iv)].

(ii) The Importance of Fire in Nuosu Customs

Fire is the most important element in Nuosu religious culture, and is seen as the great provider for the necessities of everyday life. The Yi often refer to fire as the “10,000 year flame,” which essentially represents the longevity and continuity of Yi culture and society; fire is the link between past generations and present day. On the third day of Huobajie when musical performances take place, a central bonfire is focal point for Huobajie activities. The fire is also serves a religious function as it is the one time during the year that the ancestors in the spirit world are able to look down upon the Yi in the world of the living and see their descendants. To this extent, the flame functions as a bridge between the living and the deceased. As for the daily practical aspects of fire’s importance, fire provides light, heat, and the ability to boil water and cook food. There is
an imperative reliability on fire for basic everyday survival, and Zhu goes so far as to state that fire is what allowed humans to develop from apes, and that fire’s influence “forms the consciousness” of the Yi people’s identity and humanity itself. 72

The fire hearth is the center of every Nuosu household, and the gathering place for family members and guests to converse, eat, drink, and even perform rituals. The hearth may be round or hexagonal, with a stone or metal foundation called a *shaka* 73 that is slightly raised above surface level used to safely balance pots or teakettles. 74 There are many taboos regarding the fire hearth, the worst of which would include any activity that could cause the flame to be extinguished. During the day in Laoyaoshan, wood is always added or adjusted with the use of one’s hands or tongs, and never the feet. However, wood can be adjusted using the feet at night in order to kick out any evil spirits that may have entered through the front door during nightfall, quickly sending the spirits or evil magic back to the spirit world. Wood is also adjusted by the feet during cremation ceremonies, to prevent one’s face from being too close to the fire, thereby running the risk of “inhaling” the spirit. Additionally, during the three days and three nights of New Year’s and Huobajie the embers in the fire pit must never be extinguished.

According to Zhu, the most important fire worship custom in Nuosu culture is *huozang* (火葬), a cremation ceremony for the deceased to enter Heaven. 75 As previously mentioned, the Yi believe in the existence of two worlds, the immediate material world of the living (即尘) and Heaven. Heaven is where the soul of the deceased returns to after death, where they exist with their ancestors just as they did in the world of the living. *Huozang* must be performed in order for the soul to enter Heaven. Otherwise the soul will remain in the world of the living as a ghost, causing harm to family members or
neighbors until an exorcism or the proper death ritual is performed. *Huozang* is also performed to alleviate unusual causes of death, such as leprosy or the death of an infant, and likewise must be done in a timely fashion to ensure the soul of the deceased does not get stuck in the world of the living where they could infect relatives and neighbors.76

Zhu asserts that although some people believe that *huozang* came from Indian Buddhist practices during the Wei period, in actuality there is material evidence of *huozang* existing amongst the Qiang people, of which the Yi are descendents, in the early Spring and Autumn period. The record states: “When Qiang people die, burn them in the fire. When a relative of the Qin dies, assemble firewood, as the black smoke rises, it takes them to a distant land, and they become dutiful sons, from this emerges politics, enacted through customs, in fact it is insufficient to separate one from the other.”77 *Huozang* practice was vastly spread by the end of the Tang dynasty, flourished during the time of the Song and Yuan dynasties, and began to decline by the Ming dynasty. Zhu suggests that one possible reason for *huozang*’s decline is due to the fact that it went against Confucian burial mandates, one of which states: “body is skin, received from your mother and father, don’t dare burn it!” However, the reason for *huozang*’s decline in larger Chinese society is still uncertain and the topic of debate among scholars and ritual experts.78

(iii) Huobajie Musical Norms and Characteristics According to Written Sources

To better understand what musical elements are commonly found in Huobajie performances, and Yi musical values in general, it is helpful to examine Zhu’s description of the various repertoires commonly performed during Huobajie, along with

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the intrinsic values of music in Yi society during the festival. Zhu claims that Yi are especially good at using their music to express their aspirations and emotions—happiness, anger, grief, joy, and yearning. The wide-ranging and abundant content reflects various aspects of the Yi’s lifestyle: the children sing about the future, young adults sing about society, and the elderly sing about their ancestral origins.

According to Zhu, in Liangshan the Yi are generally known to only perform songs with Yi language lyrics, whereas the Yi in Yunnan and Guizhou are also known to perform songs with Mandarin lyrics. Additionally, it is a commonly held belief amongst the Yi that the ability to sing and dance is a manifestation of one’s wisdom and spirituality. Zhu concludes with two major points: first, the “vast” Yi general public has a familiarity and/or mastery of songs from various generations, and they are widely spread. Secondly, Zhu applauds the efforts of Han and other scholars in writing and recording on the subject of Yi music, which adds to the historical and cultural reference value of Yi research at-large.79

In addition, on each of the three nights of Huobajie, the young children and youth gather to perform “Ji A Ji (祭阿祭),” a ceremony in which they hold blazing torches made from bundles of bamboo stalks and parade around the houses of their closest neighbors (a span of about thirty yards). The circuits are done once during the first night, twice the second night, and three times on the third night. While navigating around the houses the children chant/sing the following:

- Tusi use a neutered cow for the offering
- Wealthy use a lamb for the offering
- Poor use a chicken for the offering
- Bachelors use an egg for the offering

土司用大骟牛来祭
富人用大骟羊来祭
穷人用鸡来祭
光棍用蛋来祭
Widows use the *Qiaobalazi* soup for the offering.

Figure 9. Children of five neighboring houses light torches for the "Ji A Ji" ritual.

The Mandarin text is Zhu's direct translation from the Yi text spoken in Liangshan, and is the exact same as that which is chanted in Laoyaoshan. Thanks to the light from the fire torches, the "Ji A Ji" ceremony is the one time during the year where the ancestors in the spirit world can look down and see their Yi relatives in the world of the living.

The most thorough study of the history and cultural significance of Yi dance in Mandarin is a book written by Piao Yonggan entitled "Research on the Dance Traditions of the Sichuan Liangshan Yi." Piao presents various viewpoints on the topic of Yi dance movements in general, and even has a section devoted to the Huobajie dance form itself. Despite his obvious interest in the subject and knowledge about this matter, Piao's...
describes the Yi dance forms in general as being “simplistic,” and “unimpressionable.” Piao goes on to describe the dancers’ posture as “static more than dynamic;” female dancers should have a straight back, head bowed down, arms either on their hips or waving, bent knees, and raised buttocks.

Piao states that there are two main factors contributing to the continuity of the Yi’s traditional and simplistic dance movements: the first being that there is still a major lack of “artistic professionals” emerging from Yi regions, and the second is that “there is a deep-rooted history of oppression that also obstructs creativity.” While Piao does not go into much detail over the first point, his writing also exemplifies a Marxist approach to the issue as he accredits the lack of artistic professionals to “sluggish” societal development in Liangshan, in large part due to its isolation. As for the second point, Piao asserts that the past oppression of slaves is reflected in the dance’s pace and feet movements, as traditionally the White Yi and galaxy slave class were the ones known to dance the most. Until approximately 1956, the Yi slaves would be locked into a storehouse at night, with their feet chain locked into a wooden encasement. Piao broadly states that this is why Yi dance moves, especially kicking movements, allow the audience to see the bottom of the dancer’s foot. Therefore, it is through such dance moves that the slaves were able to express and develop their sense of agency by publicly displaying their hope for freedom and independence.

China’s government-run news source People’s Daily has also discussed the impact the emancipation of Yi slaves had on the development of Yi music and dance. One prominent figure in particular, Huang Shi, resided in Liangshan beginning in the early 1950s, and is one of the most well-known composers of Yi music from the mid-
In 1952, Huang Shi followed a government-selected art troupe and came to Liangshan. He was actively engaged in the struggle to crush slavery. He saw, in the wake of the progress of democratic reforms, that the slaveholders were locking slaves in chains and wooden shoes. When the slaves were emancipated, there was a lack of song and dance to express the joy of the heart. This aroused his strong desire to create. Huang Shi excitedly told his companions: "We are the party of the literary and art workers, here to help with the development of the Yi peoples’ dance— it is our compelling obligation and duty!" He was determined to give his entire body and mind to a glorious career. From then on, he traveled deep into the towering mountains to lead, across the torrential Jinsha and Dadu rivers, leaving his footprints in many Yi villages along the way. He said: "The source of art comes from life, from the people; this is the sole road to the development of dance in Liangshan."87

According to the quote above, the People’s Daily article seems to contradict Piao’s notion that the source of Yi dance movements are mostly derived from the slave class. In fact, the excerpt above hints that there was actually a lack of musical expression amongst the slaves, most likely due to restrictions implemented from the slaveholders. On the other hand, considering that Piao’s book was published twenty-five years after the article, it could indicate that as the movements taught to the slaves by Huang Shi and the dance troupes continued throughout the generations they came to be accepted as “traditional,” both within and outside of Yi society. As mentioned previously, many of the slaves in Yi society were ethnically Han, which raises more questions about the motivations and involvement of Huang Shi and the dance troupes in Liangshan in general, and how they were selected to help carry out the task of substantiating the emancipation of Yi slaves by way of music and dance training. Clearly, further research is needed to
help fill in the gaps of information to better determine the lifespan of Yi slave musical activity. However, one thing that can be taken away from the People’s Daily excerpt is that the emancipation of Yi slaves was a driving factor for why the newly instated PRC government sent dance troops to the Liangshan region, and remnants of the dance movements and musical influences from that era still remain an active feature of Yi music today.

Although Piao describes the movements themselves as simplistic, he also addresses the importance of material props in helping make the dances appear more extravagant. According to Piao, girls wear a felt cape while they dance, which helps to both highlight the rather limited arm gestures, and make up for the lack of dance complexity. As for the Huobajie dance, known as “Douhuowu (都火舞),” the yellow parasol and handkerchief are props that have been added to the dance relatively recently. The current Douhuowu fashion is for a girl to hold the yellow parasol in her right hand, while the long handkerchief extends from one girl’s left hand to another’s. Indeed, a dance line of girls each holding a yellow parasol is featured in the opening scene in Hai Lai A Zhuo’s pop song “Huobajie.” Parasols and handkerchiefs are completely absent in Laoysoshan’s Douhuowu.

In a 2010 People’s Daily article, journalist Luo Wu La Qie also discusses the symbolic importance of the yellow parasol for Huobajie, and its importance as a potential tool for change and increased societal integration. As a disclaimer, Luo states that he did not conduct research of Huobajie customs or activities prior to participating in the 2009 event in Liangshan. Luo states:
It can be said that the golden umbrella is not only a beloved ornament for the Yi girls, but it has also become a symbol of the traditional sense of Huobajie. It should be after the founding of New China that the golden umbrella appeared and became accepted as a popularity commodity in Liangshan. Golden umbrellas quickly became an extremely integral part of the traditional Torch Festival of Yi's background, and are a meaningful item with traditional cultural significance of the Liangshan that can be purchased as a travel or tourist memento. Thus, with the continuation and development of any culture comes inevitable change. Therefore change should be the premise of maintaining one's excellence, under this premise we can learn to integrate. Golden umbrellas are not only a symbol of the traditional sense of the Liangshan Yi Torch Festival, they are also a cultural reference representing fusion and development, they are a symbol of change. Their color and shape is the same as the sun, a symbol of heat, life and growth, a symbol of infinite joy. Joy is the pursuit of the highest realm of human life. The Yi girls in the Torch Festival, propped with golden umbrellas, have infinite joy just like wind rippling between heaven and earth.

When asked why the use of the yellow parasol is considered a recent development, one woman in Laoyaoshan explained that traditionally yellow was a color representative of the elders, but within the past two generations more and more young girls have begun wearing yellow and appropriating it as more of a “youthful” color. The same woman stated that, according to her understanding, the use of the yellow parasol prop is not a recent development, but has in fact been an active part of Huobajie dance performance for multiple generations. Her late grandfather, a well-known and respected Nuosu Yi from Liangshan, accredited the yellow parasol with representing five significant features of Nuosu tradition. First, the yellow parasol, also known as huohuasan (活花伞 meaning the young girl’s life will blossom like a flower), allows the sun to look down to the girls and shine its light on all the Yi. To help the sun find the dancing girls, the umbrellas are held upright with the yellow color facing the sky. The first factor is tied with the second,
which is that the *huohuasan* represents peace and security (平安). The third point is similar to what Piao states as the main function of the parasol; the girls are considered to look exceptionally beautiful with the *huohuasan*. The girls will hold the parasol at their sides and spin them counterclockwise while looking the opposite direction to show off or try to attract the spectators. The fourth function is that girls who danced with the parasol were considered single, if only for that night, and could have relations with a male youth that night. Lastly, the yellow parasol represents the forthcoming seasonal change of the flowers and crops colors from a lush green summer, to a dry yellow fall.

According to Piao, some people believe Douhuowu to be Liangshan’s sole traditional festival dance that was created after the migration to the Liangshan region. As mentioned previously, based on the movements of the dance many scholars believe Douhuowu to date back to the early era of slave society. Piao explains that historical elements of division of labor are evident in the dance movements, particularly the male discrimination against females in dance movements and formations, and the need to uphold the perception of masculinity and bravery through the wrestling and horse racing activities. The Yi are also known as the “hunter” minority, which is why some dance movements depict herding, beating, and even imitations of deer. Male and female societal segregation is symbolized most obviously in the Douhuowu in that the dance is confined to females only. It is believed that this custom has been passed down from generation to generation (遗风), and is still followed very seriously. When referring to the Douhuowu specifically, Liangshan Yi scholar Hu Qing Jun states, “More often than not, Yi songs are performed by men. White Yi female dance contexts also exist, but men and women must be separated; they absolutely cannot mix.”
Piao’s analysis presents several important considerations as to the origin of Yi dance movements based on historical societal structure, norms, and customs. Unfortunately Piao’s analysis does not align these claims with specific dance steps or movements, but rather his work draws the line between Yi music and socio-cultural practices at a general level. This generality is still highly viable, in that most of Piao’s analysis builds upon earlier research, surveys, and interviews with various elders in the Liangshan region. His material, along with the excerpts from the People’s Daily articles, are primary sources offering first-hand insight into Yi Huobajie musical life from both the insider and outsider (Han) perspectives. Furthermore, Piao’s landmark publication emphasizes that many elements of what is considered to be “traditional” or part of “ancient” Yi society are still present and actively performed through music and dance in contemporary Yi environments.

(iv) Significance of Huobajie in Laoyaoshan

Huobajie in Laoyaoshan is understood from a cosmological perspective with abundant religious practices associated with various gods and legends. There are different gods associated with each day of the festival’s duration: day one is bbu tut jix dep (day of bbu tut), day two is ke pu vu dep, and day three is va pu gu dep (day of the chicken god). Of these three gods, bbu tut jix dep is the only one whose legend is fairly well known. When bbu tut jix dep changed from being a fellow Yi commoner to a god in the spirit world, he took all of his family and animals with him on the journey. However, he forgot his favorite animal, a grey sheep, in the world of the living, and has been eternally upset ever since. This explains why the sheep is so essential to the Yi’s Huobajie ceremonial
activities, and why every year each several families gather together and prepare a white or grey sheep for a communal feast (day one), and offer the charred skull and leg bones to the god as the final part of the ceremony (day three).

Once the sheep is slaughtered (by means of suffocation), three stones are placed in the fire pit. Once the stones turn completely red, they are placed on the outer ledge of the fire pit, and the sheep meat is placed on top as an offering to bbu tut jix dep, located in a small hanging alter on the wall directly in front of the fire pit parallel to the main entrance of the home. Next the meat is cleaned and filled with mala (麻辣) spice to detract the bugs, and cooked in a soup with fragrant he ku bu sse greens that were also dried by the fire pit. The leg meat is hung above the entrance doorway slightly to the right as you enter the home, and not eaten until after Huobajie has ended.

In addition to preparing the meat for the feast, the Nuosu in Laoyaoshan closely inspect the gallbladder and the right shoulder bone of the sheep, which indicates the fortunes or misfortunes that may ensue the following year. The shape and length of the gallbladder are the most important features, and if considered lucky it gets hung on the wall next to the ancestral spirit shrine. The process of inspecting the shoulder bone is a more complicated procedure, and only two women in Laoyaoshan are proficient in understanding the significance and subtleties of its various features. If the shoulder bone is auspicious then it is left on the offering table below the spirit shrine throughout the year for guests and family members to admire. However, if the bone is considered to be inauspicious, it is immediately disposed of. Suffice it to say, the sacrificial offering to bbu tut jix dep and the oracle reading of the sheep’s gallbladder and shoulder bone are the most important ceremonial aspects in Huobajie. The offering pleases the god of Huobajie,
while the reading of the bone and gallbladder provide indications, whether they be auspicious or worrisome, of what the family can expect to occur within the coming year.

Day two seems to be a day of rest, where families will visit multiple households and feast throughout the day. There was also no dance rehearsal on the second day of Huobajie, as this day was understood by all Laoyaoshan residents to be a day of rest. Huobajie music performances always take place on the third day in any given Yi Huobajie festival calendar. Directly following the “Ji A Ji” ceremony on the third and final night, the children are led up a hill by an elder to prepare miniature offerings to va pu gu dep. Bamboo stalks are cut in half and in sections about six inches long, then balanced between two intersecting sticks on either side to create a sort of trowel-like effect. The trowels are prepared in front of a large burning pile of bamboo that makes up the collection of all the children’s torches from the “Ji A Ji” ceremony. The stalks function as follows in order from closest to the fire: the first stalk represents cows, the second stalk represents horses, the third represents lamb, the fourth represents adult sheep, and the fifth represents pigs. Each stalk is filled with salt except for the one that represents pigs, which is filled instead with ground buckwheat.
The purpose of this ritual on the final day of Huobajie is to thank the gods for a bountiful year, and to pray for the health of their family livestock in the year to come. Throughout the duration of this offering, the children and the adult present make loud noises mimicking the sounds of the animals represented by the bamboo stalks, as well as chicken and rooster calls. However, the chicken is not represented by a stalk, because, as they explain to va pu gu dep, they have already eaten the chicken and no physical parts remain. The offering concludes with a grand finale of all members running quickly down the hill back to their homes, leaving the torches to burn and never looking back.
Although the Yi in Laoyaoshan are unfamiliar with the legends commonly associated with Huobajie found in Liangshan, Laoyaoshan residents maintain a highly religious sense of purpose when practicing Huobajie activities such as the stalk offering to the chicken god. In addition, although Laoyaoshan residents claim to have only had music other than nyop nyop hxo since 2010, the “Ji A Ji” ceremony clearly involves a tonal chant. Since the “Ji A Ji” chant is not considered part of the Huobajie musical repertoire per se, the primary significance of Huobajie in Laoyaoshan is still highly religious. Prior to Qiaotou government involvement in 2010, spectacle was never a serious consideration for Laoyaoshan residents, as there was no direct link to their religious functionality. The changes observed between 2011 and 2012 indicates that the Qiaotou sponsorship led to major conceptual shifts regarding the importance of “performing” Huobajie for themselves as well as for their ancestors in spirit world. The following chapters will continue to explore the shift in agency and conceptualization of the Laoyaoshan Nuosu Yi’s Huobajie, music, and identity.
Chapter IV: Ethnography of Musical Change in Laoyaoshan

(i) Background and Huobajie 2010

The Qiaotou government began getting involved in Laoyaoshan Huobajie activities in 2010, and for the first time ever some type of formalized musical performance was included as an indispensable part of the event. After fifteen years of not being allowed to dance, the wife of Jiajia’s third eldest brother in law, who moved to Laoyaoshan from Wuxi in 1995, took up the challenge of teaching several dances to prepare for the 2010 Huobajie. All of the dances taught were ones she remembered from childhood, but practice was infrequent and standards for the performance were unspecified. As a result, the Qiaotou performance panel judges were not impressed with the Laoyaoshan performance, as dance moves were out of sync, offbeat, or forgotten entirely. Laoyaoshan’s 2010 Huobajie was considered to be somewhat of a failure in the eyes of the Laoyaoshan people, who for the first time were put on display with other neighboring Yi communities to show off their youth’s cultural knowledge and abilities in a performance setting.

At the same time some elements of the 2010 Huobajie were still in line with what the people of Laoyaoshan considered to be culturally appropriate and correct. Specifically, the bonfire itself was large, with flames going well above most adults’ heads, whereas the 2011 Huobajie flames was lit on a torch with a flame no larger than one ft. diameter. The bonfire has always been the focal point of Huobajie; acting as a stage in which people dance in clockwise circles around as well as the provider of light and warmth for spectators. The government’s primary concern and the reason for such a dramatic change...
to the bonfire size was that such a large flame was hazardous to the young children playing nearby, and moreover the government could possibly be held responsible if any accident occurred. However, people of Laoyaoshan described the 2010 Huobajie flame as “still good” in the sense that the essential function of the fire was still carried out— it was a large and strong flame for which the entire Laoyaoshan community could gather and appreciate.

(ii) Huobajie 2011

After the feelings of disgruntlement from the 2010 Huobajie experience, in summer of 2011 five female youth of Laoyaoshan decided to practice all new dances to prepare for the day of the music competition. As mentioned previously, these youth began going to Jiajia’s home daily beginning on July 10th, fifteen days in advance, and practiced the same five dances from early morning until “after dinner time,” at about 7pm. Jiajia did her best to help the girls prepare for the competition, studying the dance steps seen on a DVD of Dali Yi’s Huobajie and, similar to the woman from Wuxi, teaching dances she learned from childhood. The program of the Huobajie 2011 included (in chronological order): an opening speech by a Qiaotou official judging the event, dances and solo songs by the thirteen neighboring Yi villages in the area, an all-women’s tug-of-war competition, and a horse race. Apparently, 2011 was also the first year to include the tug-of-war and horse race events, activities that were discontinued in 2012 despite the women of Upper Laoyashan winning the tug-of-war competition in 2011.

The role of the Laoyaoshan tusi in 2011 cannot be understated. The tusi is the one resident of Laoyaoshan who must be in constant dialogue with the Qiaotou government,
and act as an official who can transmit messages to locals while making sure the desires of the Qiaotou government are fulfilled. The tusi would frequently come down to Jiajia’s house to observe the girls dancing, and offer “suggestions” based on the standards that the Qiaotou government hoped to implement. One such “suggestion” was that the girls must perform a dance to the Tibetan pop song “Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” by Yang Jin La Mu (央金拉姆). The girls were also told it would be best if they were willing to wear Tibetan clothing for the dance, however Jiajia and the other girls calmly refused, with the simple excuse that they did not have Tibetan clothing, nor did they have money to purchase the necessary garments. To the Qiaotou officials’ dismay, Jiajia did not teach Tibetan dance steps to “Pasture of Flourishing Flowers,” but rather taught the girls Yi dance moves that were rhythmically similar and adaptable to align with the pulse of the Tibetan song.

This witty approach is remarkable in two major ways. Firstly, it shows the willingness on the part of the Yi to test the degree to which they must concede to external demands, while still promoting their own self-interests. Secondly, it proves how one member of a community who is music-savvy can adhere to the absolute basic elements of these foreign demands, in this case performing a dance to a Tibetan pop song, while still maintaining culturally appropriate aesthetics for the very integrity of Huobajie and the Yi themselves by applying Nuosu-specific dance movements to fit a different rhythmic context.

On July 25, 2011, some members of the Qiaotou government and hundreds of Nuosu Yi from Laoyaoshan and thirteen other surrounding villages came to a central plateau to participate in the Huobajie performance festivities. The audience formed a
large semicircle around the staged area where the performances were to be held, with members from the Qiaotou government seated due west in chairs with a long table acting as a panel of judges for the performance competition. Above the Qiaotou government members was a large red banner proclaiming the 2011 Huobajie as the 2\textsuperscript{nd} annual Huobajie in the region. All of the performers danced or sang facing the evaluation committee, which for the first time instated a monetary award system for each rank of the competition. One cannot help but draw parallels between this style of performance and the context of Tang dynasty court performances, which likewise featured songs and dances from minority groups and foreign countries as a form of tribute to the emperor.

Figure 11. Families gather around the stage area and judge panel for Huobajie 2011 performances.
The 2011 Huobajie was the first year to have microphones and amplifiers for the VCD player. The opening speech by the Qiaotou government officials, spoken in mandarin, was as follows:

"The next few years will be a time of social and economic development. Cultural tourism is hot/popular, as are the differences between rural and urban society. There are two sides to every coin: where there is crisis, there is also high opportunity. In accordance to the national level of poverty, the town of Qiaoutou will act in a forward-thinking manner towards the direction of economic and social development. Become opposite to reveal the image through the window."

Other than the excerpt above, there was no mention of Huobajie, or its value to Yi or Chinese culture. In addition, the Qiaotou officials conducted the entirety of the opening speech; no local Yi were included in the opening ceremonial remarks. The opening speech acted essentially as the mouthpiece of larger government, and the tone was clearly one targeted towards the impoverished Laoyaoshan community. In an attempt to shift their conceptualization of Huobajie being an innately Yi festival to one of larger inclusivity, the opening speech likewise spoke of the potential economic benefits associated with promoting one’s culture to a wider audience as a tourist spectacle.

Dean MacCannell and Peter Manning’s works highlight culturally significant features of semiotics, with a particular focus on the role of tourism and context representation. In considering MacCannell’s discussions on markers, sights, and signs, it becomes clear that in Laoyaoshan’s Huobajie 2011 the power dynamics shifted from Yi self-representation to state government facilitation. In essence, the ideologically determined opening speech blaring phrases ensuring continued socio-economic...
development, was newly signified with the presence of banners and technology. Essentially, as changes were made to the procedures of the festival and the environment itself, the overall appearance, form, and significance of the festival was likewise altered. When broken down to this degree, it becomes clear that the signifier’s role is not merely one of festival representation, but rather it is a means of securing control over the Nuosu people themselves.

(iii) Huobajie 2011: Music and Dance Analysis

Figure 12. Upper Laoyaoshan girls performance “Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” in 2011.101

The Laoyaoshan girls were the third dance troupe to perform, in which they danced to the aforementioned Tibetan pop song “The Pasture of Flourishing Flowers.”102 The following rules apply for all transcriptions: R=right, L=left, B=backwards, and F=forwards. All motions are documented from the dancer’s perspective, and are recorded...
based on the occurrence of a major physical shift of the body, notably, the point in which the feet begin to shift direction. All movements are placed below the melody line on the beat in which they occur, and movement titles are included to help distinguish between differing sections.

Many of the movements in the dance are related to herding cows and yaks, a daily activity of Laoyaoshan life. The movements related to cows and yaks include: “whipping,” “herding,” “beating,” and “tying.” The “whipping” motion includes fourteen shifts, and occurs from measures 1-21. A full “whipping” motion involves crossing the arms on the first beat after a turn, and a raising the arm opposite the direction the dancer is facing on the third beat. The “whipping” motion also includes a transitory movement in which the same arm that was raised on the third beat moves swiftly across the center of the dancer’s body as they shift to the alternate direction. The “herding” motion includes eight shifts, occurring from measures 22-29 during the C section of the song, which is completely absent of vocals. The motion involves the dancer raising both arms on the downbeat of every measure with a dotted half-note as their body shifts forwards and backwards. The arms sway across the body down and to the right when facing backwards, down and to the left when facing forwards.

The “beating cow” motion includes eleven shifts, and occurs from measures 59-69. A complete shift involves sticking one arm out in the direction in which the dancer is moving, while the opposite arm swings inwards towards the body once, and is followed by a clockwise or counterclockwise (right arm swings clockwise, left arm counterclockwise) circular motion that transitions into the next sequence. The final cow-related movement is the “riding” motion, which includes ten shifts and occurs from
measures 69-79. The “riding” movement involves making small and quick circular motions with one’s hands in front of their body as they move; like gears grinding one in front of other. On the third beat of the movement the dancer shifts the opposite direction, and lifts both arms up on the fourth beat. Visually the effect is that the dancer is pulling on the saddle ropes, causing the cow to stop and quickly shift directions.

“The Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” also includes other movements, such as the “field labor,” the “moving sun,” and “flowers waving.” The “field labor” includes twenty-one shifts, occurs from measures 30-50, and is the longest successive movement in the entire song. While the dancers move forward, both arms cross in front of the their bodies once, representing the spread of seeds in the fields, followed by an upward motion that represents the crops growing and flowers blooming. Hands are then placed on the hips as they move backwards, portraying a stance that is likening to that of a field laborer.

 Appropriately following the “field labor” motion is the “flowers waving” motion, which like the “herding” movement occurs during the C section in measures 50-59. For this motion, hands are held over the head and move from side to side in the air while the dancer changes position, with an extended movement on the dotted half notes in which the arms move in the same direction the dancer is facing; the movement effectively represents the bending of flowers in the wind.

The final motion of the dance is the “moving sun,” which has similar characteristics to the “flowers waving” motion. The “moving sun” movement occurs from measures 80 to the end of the piece, with a total of fourteen directional shifts. The most major difference between the “moving sun” motion and the “waving flowers” motion is that when doing the “moving sun” motion, the body does not shift at 90° on the
turns, but rather faces forward for the movement’s entirety. The shifts from right to left in this case are only steps to the side, with arm movements following in the same direction. The hands are held above the head with palms facing away from the dancer, and complete one and a half circles with each movement. This movement represents the sun moving around the globe, and more abstractly, the passing of time.

The movements in “The Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” are especially effective given the context of the performance. The Nuosu in Laoyaoshan were told by the tusi that they must prepare a dance for the Tibetan pop song, and thus they choose movements which, although recognized as being “Yi” dance moves, are applicable to the living conditions and imagined scenery that Tibetans in the countryside likewise experience in everyday life. The case of “The Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” is unique in that, aside from the song itself, all the surrounding elements of the performance were unquestionably “Yi” in nature. At the same time, the people of Laoyaoshan still maintained the legitimacy to say that they followed the instructions and requests of the Qiaotou government. The “The Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” case is essentially a clever negotiation of identity and willingness to adapt to an outside influence between the Qiaotou government and the Laoyaoshan community; an active negotiation through public musical performance.

The second dance number the Laoyaoshan girls performed was the aforementioned “July Huobajie, (See Appendix B, p.)” recorded by the band Yiren Zhizao. While some of the dance movements in this example are slightly more ambiguous, such as when the dancers are simply strutting or walking back and forth, almost all of the hand motions are related to fire, or to Huobajie in general. The
movements in this example include: "flames, fire spread, hiking, gavvu bird, lifting arms, torch, stirring fire, walking, flames spreading, and skirt twist."

The dance begins with the six dancers in two lines facing each other, doing the "lifting arms" motion on beats one and three during the synthesizer introduction (detailed explanation below). The introduction is followed by the "flames" movement, which involves a quick succession of hand movements from left to right with the palms facing inward towards each other. On every seventh beat, the movement is prolonged for an extra beat, complimenting the half notes in the melody. Both lines begin by moving their arms to the left, and because they are facing one another this creates the effect that the flames are crossing one through one another. The "L" and "R" indications in the transcription represent the final prolonged movement described above, which occurs from measures 1-16.

The "fire spread" movement occurs from measures 17-28, and has two major components. The beginning "L" on the dotted half note indicates that the extended left arm moves from right to left, with the palm flat facing the ground, while the right hand rests on the dancer's hip. The movement is reversed when an "R" indication appears below a dotted half note. Following the long motions are the "(L" and "R)" motions, which indicate both arms are swaying upward to the left or right. The swaying arms portion of the movement represents flames growing stronger, and the extended arm motion represents the flames spreading across vast areas of land.

The "hiking" move occurs from measures 29-36, and again at measures 114-121. The dancer moves forward for three beats, and begins to turn in the opposite direction on the third beat (in this case forwards or backwards). The turn is completed on the fourth
beat, at which time the dancer raises their arms on each side with their hands in fists and bends their knees slightly to dip downwards on the downbeat. The movement is similar to a person hiking up a steep slope or mountain, while the dip shows and represents the physical strength and endurance of the Yi who live and work in such environs. The “hiking” movement is also a recurring theme in other dances, such as Laoyaoshan’s 2012 Huobajie rendition of “Welcome Here (请来到这里)” by Yang Xue Liang.104

The “guvu bird” movement occurs from measures 37-50, at a point where the synthesizer pauses and the band shouts loud “whoo!” calls to represent the sound of the guvu birds. Guvu birds are a well-known animal associated with Nuosu culture, and are revered for their beauty and mysterious nature as they only appear once a year, near the time of Huobajie, and even then they are rarely encountered. The guvu bird movement lasts throughout the next musical section, where hand drums enter on the fifth “whoo!” on the downbeat of measure 38. Each arm rises alternatively, like flexible wings, on beats one and three. The right arm is the first to lift while the left arm is by the dancer’s side, and on beat three the left arm swoops up while the right arm casually drops. The “skirt twist” occurs from measures 114 to the end of the song, where the drum beat returns and guvu bird “whoo!” calls continue throughout. The twisting and showing off of the vibrant and colorful skirts is representative of the guvu bird’s tail gliding in the wind.

The drumbeats cease at measure 50, at which point the synthesizer enters with the same music as the introduction through measure 65. The dancers realign themselves in the original formation, two rows with three girls on either side, to prepare for the “lifting arms” movement. With their hands in fists, the dancers lift their arms up and down with their elbows bent so their arms are at a 90° angle. Their fists reach to approximately the
level of their chin, and drop back again allowing their elbows to move slightly past their back. The dancers lift their arms on beats one and three of each measure, and although the “lifting arms” movement is the most repetitive motion in the entire dance, it also proves to be the most challenging motion for all the dancers to rhythmically sync with one another. This may be due to the fact that there is very little foot or dance movement, making it more difficult for some of the dancers to keep time since the melodic rhythm is also syncopated. This was less obvious in 2011 than it was when the dancers performed the same dance again in 2012, when a total of eight dancers performed. According to some Laoyaoshan community members in the audience, several of the dancers in 2012 were considered to be “too old” and therefore “too slow” to do the movements correctly. Jiajia explained that aside from older women having the innate condition and custom of not dancing after they’ve married, a lifetime of difficult physical labor has taken a toll on their bodies; their arms are too heavy to lift in such quick succession and their shoulders are no longer as flexible as they were when they were younger.

The “torch” movement occurs from measures 66-81. An indication such as “B+R arm” in measure 66 signifies that the dancer is facing backwards with their right arm raised in the air and their hand shaking, while the left arm is straightened out to the left side of their body. Following four measures of these movements, the dancers then move their hand in small circles in the same direction they are moving (right or left) while the opposite hand is placed on the hip. The “B+R arm” movement resembles the extended bamboo torch used during the “Ji A Ji” ceremony, with the waving hand representing the flame. The small circular motions represent the torchlight’s guidance through darkness.
The "stirring fire" and "flames" movements occur from measures 81-93. The sequence involves the dancer with their hands forward, one on top of the other, pushing down continuously as they bend their knees. Following the "stirring fire" movement is the "flames' movement, which is similar to the previously mentioned "flames spreading" movement. Similarly, the dancers face one another and shift their arms from side to side, but whereas the "flames spreading" motion involves keeping one's hands approximately above the waist line, the "flames" motion involves the palms facing outward, representing a stronger and higher flame than before. The "stirring fire" and "flames" movements are representative of when one adjusts or pushes wood in the fire pit once the fire has gone out in order to rekindle the flames again. These motions are followed by the "walking" movement, which involves the dancer walking forwards and backwards with their hands on their hips, turning on the fourth beat of each measure.

Musical similarities also exist between the two pieces. The tempo of both pieces is allegro, "July Huobajie" with 144 BPM and "Pasture of Flourishing Flowers" fluctuating between 130-132 BPM. In terms of form, both "July Huobajie" and "Pasture of Flourishing Flowers" have A sections comprising of verses. The note values in both the A section verses are consistently short in duration, mostly eighth and sixteenth notes. The fast pace of the A sections are distinctly contrasted with the B sections, a chorus in "July Huobajie" and a recurring melodic bridge in "Pasture of Flourishing Flowers", where the note values are held longer (dotted half notes in both instances). In terms of mode, both pieces are in minor keys, "July Huobajie" is in the key of E minor and "Pasture of Flourishing Flowers" is in the key of C minor. The melodic range of "Pasture of Flourishing Flowers" is from the lower range tonic (C4) to the upper register dominant
(G5), and the melodic range of “July Huobajie is from the lower register dominant (B3) to the upper register mediant, which is likewise (G5). There are no instances of chromaticism, similar to the folk songs recorded in 2012 in Laoyaoshan [section (vi)]. However, while many of the Yi folk song melodies recorded in 2012 follow the major or minor pentatonic scale, the subdominant (fourth scale degree) is prevalent in both the “July Huobajie” and “Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” melodies.

(iv) A Pan-Ethnic Atmosphere and the Grievances of Huobajie 2011

In addition to implementing the monetary award system for performances, 2011 was the first year to have Yi girls dressed in Tibetan garments with braided hair, dancing to Tibetan songs. Some songs even featured a combination of girls dancing together dressed in both Yi and Tibetan outfits. Recently, Huobajie has been celebrated amongst minority groups other than Yi and in towns far-removed from Yi regions. In an interview outside of Laoyaoshan, I was told very directly by a Yi informant that the more recent Tibetan fire torch festival is merely a commodification of the Yi’s Huobajie celebration; they are not related. This is an argument likewise found in Zhu Wenxu’s introduction. Referring specifically to the Tibetan songs, some audience members stated “the music this year is unfamiliar, like a stranger (陌生) to us,” and, “the performance situation/setting has really changed, it’s very strange.” On the other hand, a Yi relative in the audience from outside of Laoyaoshan stated in an optimistic tone, “Laoyaoshan never had Tibetan performances before the government became involved, now it’s a big component. Yi, Tibetan, it doesn’t matter what ethnicity you are, the government welcomes them all to come to our Huobajie.”
What is the significance of having pan-ethnic performances in Laoyaoshan at what was in the past a Yi-exclusive Huobajie? What are the pros and cons of such inclusive interaction for the Yi and the PRC? Phillip Bohlman’s “The Land Where Two Streams Flow” discusses a unique case study of how German-Jewish immigrants coming into Israel brought with them Western Art music, which was then adopted and adapted to fit within Israeli society. In his book, Bohlman presents the idea that the more an ethnic community tends towards pluralism, the more musical change tends to originate within the community. Importantly, Bohlman asserts that consolidation does not necessarily lead to musical loss, though certain pieces may be abandoned in the process. In the case of the Yi at Laoyaoshan, the situation Bohlman describes takes on slightly different form: the Yi are readjusting and pluralizing their performance repertoires not as a diasporic group in need of reaffirming their musicality, but rather as a pre-established cultural group adapting to changes on their own turf.

Still, the Yi performances in the presence of the government officials are undergoing some of the same compromises as the German-Jewish community in Israel, such as the linguistic shift of including songs with Mandarin lyrics, the Qiaotou government opening speeches, and the Yi speaking Mandarin when providing introductions to the pieces being performed. Considering the dramatic contextual changes to the Huobajie events with state involvement, the choice of using Mandarin to run the events was unquestionable, despite the fact that most of the Yi women over the age of fifty have limited to no understanding of Mandarin. Just as the *aliyah* acknowledge the linguistic plurality amongst Israeli audience members, the Yi realize the linguistic
concession they must make on behalf of their new Han sponsors, even if it means excluding some of its own members.

The inclusion of Tibetan music and dance performance at the Huobajie festival, as well as the increased presence of government officials and use of Mandarin, indicates that there is a growing awareness of Huobajie that is spreading beyond the scope of the Yi. Recently, locations like Dali and Liangshan that host Huobajie are being video recorded and played on national CCTV broadcasting channels, or are otherwise available to purchase. Now, much of the repertoire included on these VCDs is Tibetan pop songs, or Han pop songs with Mandarin lyrics. Though it cannot be said definitively, the promotion of this type of repertoire could explain why recent up-and-coming Yi pop singers choose to include a mixture of Yi and Mandarin lyrics in their songs, or why some song lyrics are written and sung entirely in Mandarin even if their subject matter is “Yi” in every other respect.\footnote{106}

While the Yi may benefit from such increased cultural exposure, and some may receive monetary compensation for publicity, what is the state gaining from its involvement? The fact that the festival is now a state-sponsored event being promoted publicly means that some viewers will perceive the PRC government as simply encouraging minority customs and traditions. In addition, broadcasting a Huobajie event with the majority of songs being sung in Mandarin also reflects highly upon integrative education policies, by showing that the Yi youth in remote regions are successfully developing a comprehensive understanding of the dominant national language. The observation that there are actually more layers of change and commodification to the musical performance than elements continuing from years past parallels Gellner’s
discussion on the tendency for nationalists to appropriate folk music as a representative feature of the state:

Society no longer worships itself through religious symbols; a modern, streamlined, on-wheels high culture celebrates itself in song, dance, which it borrows from a folk culture which it fondly believes itself to be perpetuating, defending, and reaffirming.\textsuperscript{107}

Generally speaking, nationalist ideology suffers from pervasive false consciousness. Its myths invert reality: it claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture; it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society.\textsuperscript{108}

It is unlikely that a Han Chinese citizen would sing a Yi song and claim him/herself to be ethnically “Yi.” Rather, Gellner’s points address a core motivation of the state that has been occurring in China for decades: the aggregate of various minority groups during sponsored events superficially presents a pan-ethnic conglomerate atmosphere that can fall under the state-approved label of “Chinese” culture. In reality, it is the diminishing of minority cultural distinctiveness under state-imposed standardization that is actually being perpetuated and reaffirmed. As mentioned previously, the role of the Qiaotou government at the 2011 Huobajie was not merely to sponsor the festival activities, their presence was felt as a means of facilitating subordinate control of the Nuosu that otherwise fall out of reach of their everyday jurisdiction.

On a larger and more violent scale, much of the Tibetan independence struggles and revolts both in and outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region are quickly “subdued” by the more powerful political authorities. However, in recent years Tibetans residing in
the Gyalthang (northern Yunnan region including Diqing and Zhongdian/Shangri-la, related to Khampa Tibetans) have enjoyed the benefits of an economic boom funneled by a dramatic increase in tourism since at least the 1980s. As the only Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, the increase in both domestic and foreign tourists traveling to Diqing led to increased success rates of small businesses, and many Tibetan families find that they are financially better off now than ever before. The result of such abundant opportunities for accumulating greater personal wealth is that Tibetans in the Gyalthang region are relatively more happy and peaceful than in those in regions where the poverty rate is higher and suppression of religious rights is more extreme. Political scientist Ben Hillman likewise attests to the unique situation in Diqing in his article *China’s many Tibets: Diqing as a model for ‘development with Tibetan characteristics?’*:

In comparison with neighboring Tibetan areas, Diqing’s leaders have been remarkably successful in pursuing economic growth and social stability over the past decade. Their success has been made possible not just by sound economic planning based on inclusive development, but also by adopting a relatively liberal approach to cultural and religious expression. In fact, the region’s tourism development strategy has been rooted in the celebration of Tibetan culture.¹⁰⁹

Due to the relatively peaceful attitude of Tibetans in the region, I have found that Tibetan dance movements and music repertoires are commonly at the forefront of multiethnic musical performances in Yunnan Province, regardless of whether or not the dancers themselves are of Tibetan ethnicity. In his book *Ethnic Minority Issues in Yunnan*, former director of the School for International Training (SIT) likewise states, “Tibetans within Yunnan are, in effect, a peripheral group within and already peripheral
group in relation to the “Han” Chinese, the People’s Republic of China, and even to the majority of Tibetans.” In this way, Khampa Tibetans, a group whose active protests against PRC political control could in this context be seen as being “subdued” and even reversed to the point where Tibetans in the Gyalthang region are more eager and willing to engage in Han economic and political strategies out of familial and self-interests, were presented as a sort of “model minority” group for which the Yi could be inspired to follow or even more directly imitate.

Aside from the fact that Huobajie was seen in Laoyaoshan as being a Yi-specific event, the older generation also remembers the raids and unofficial warfare that took place between Yi and Tibetans during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Following the occupation of what since 1959 has been known as the Tibet Autonomous Region under PRC government jurisdiction, some Tibetans were displaced and became nomadic bandits. This was also before citizen gun ownership was outlawed in China, and people would be killed or injured in raids to steal or protect land or livestock, or in acts of revenge. According to Tibetan scholar Norbu, effects of the Khamba uprisings were especially severe in “those regions where ‘democratic reforms’ were most widespread, including Liangshan, Apha Kanze, and Beijing.” The Yi in Laoyaoshan all claim that their current relationship with Tibetans is “friendly,” and to a large extent their relationship is considered to be better than that of the Han.

Despite improved relations between the two groups, the Qiaotou government’s promotion of Tibetan cultural elements likely recalled sentiments of the elders in the community who still remember the Yi-Tibetan disputes. This claim is merely speculative, and as previously mentioned most of the Yi in Laoyaoshan prefer to maintain the status
quo and avoid reviving any former disputes between the two groups. Regardless of the
degree to which these sentiments may or may not have been present, many of the Yi felt
that it was ridiculous to have their young girls dress and dance like Tibetans. One
anonymous resident felt so passionately about this issue that when the government asked
if anyone had a VCD player available to play the Tibetan songs, she immediately offered
for them to use her VCD player, knowing that it was old and would have technical
problems specifically when playing the Tibetan songs, or the songs in which the girls
dressed as Tibetans were to dance. Indeed, during many of the dances songs would skip,
cut off, or switch to another track entirely. While on the surface these issues were seen
merely as a problem of having inadequate equipment or Yi personnel who were
unfamiliar with operating the equipment, in reality the audio mistakes were a deliberate
and intentional attempt to sabotage the performance of the Tibetan dance numbers that
were perceived as unfamiliar, ridiculous, and detracting from the meanings and functions
of Huobajie in Laoyaoshan, and to their collective identity.

According to informants, during the meeting in Qiaotou with the Laoyaoshan
community the government stated that they provide approximately 150,000 RMB
(approximately $25,000 USD) for festival events and competition awards. In reality the
total prize money only amounted to about 700 RMB ($115 USD), divided amongst the
top three village performances out of thirteen. The Laoyaoshan residents were awarded
180 RMB ($30 USD) for coming in first place in the all-women tug-of-war event, but
received no money for being awarded eighth place in the music and dance competition
component. To put this result into perspective, the twenty families in Upper Laoyaoshan
received a total of 9 RMB ($1.50 USD) for their efforts in 2011. What angered the
Laoyaoshan community most of all was not only that they felt they received eighth place unjustly, but also that the top places were those performances in which some or all of the girls dressed in Tibetan clothing.

The Yi then saw the decision of the judge’s music awards not to be based on the dance or musical ability of the performers, but rather on how far the Yi performers were willing to go to compromise the customs of their Yi festival in order to pander to the pan-ethnic display that the Qiaotou government desired. The monetary award system, which originally excited and motivated the different villages to prepare further in advance for the festival activities, ended up causing conflict amongst the various villages, and further discouraged other villages, including Laoyaoshan, that were already skeptical about the Qiaotou government’s presence to begin with. One resident in Laoyaoshan even took advantage of the desire to utilize technology by offering faulty equipment to play the Tibetan pop songs, a subtle but effective act of resistance against change. These grievances had a strong impact on the Nuosu in Laoyaoshan, so much so that when discussing the possible government presence at Huobajie in 2012, one resident remarked:

“Last year they changed our clothing, this year they’ll change our hearts; we Yi won’t have it. The young girls that you see wearing Tibetan clothing wear it because they like Tibetan and Han culture, they’ve already adapted, but I can tell you, the elders all despise them for this... This year’s Huobajie is very, very important for us.”

(v) Huobajie 2012

Initially in 2012, there was uncertainty as to whether or not the Qiaotou government was going to sponsor Huobajie, or if they would participate at all. Residents in Laoyaoshan who were in more frequent contact with the officials would generally be
told that they needed more time to meet and discuss certain details of the 2012 Huobajie. In early July, several Qiaotou officials met with the Laoyaoshan community at the shut down elementary school and asked if they would be willing to allow some neighboring Lisu minority groups come to participate. This suggestion was met with stark resistance of the Laoyaoshan people, and in response the officials said they needed to yet again prolong the decision-making process. Due to these types of circumstances in 2012, the Qiaotou government was frequently described as being “chaotic (混乱)” and “vague (很清楚).”

Huobajie 2012 lasted from August 11-13 according to the lunar calendar, and the youth in Laoyaoshan began gathering together to practice around 6pm every night beginning on August 2. While many people were convinced that the government wouldn’t come, there were also rumors circulating that Qiaotou officials had already been in contact with neighboring villages, and that they had been rehearsing since mid-late July. While it may have been true that some of the other villages began rehearsing earlier than the Laoyaoshan community, the rumors and speculation that the government was intentionally ignoring them in order to give other villages an advantage in the case that they would hold another music competition were likely remnants of feelings of victimization from the 2011 Huobajie experience.

Huobajie 2012 was yet again a year of many musical and cultural changes in Laoyaoshan. Beginning on the first evening gathering on August 2, not only did women of all ages come to watch the girls dance, but so did the men. 2012 was the first year that the majority of families would gather together every night to participate either physically or verbally, or to simply observe and enjoy the music and conversation. In fact in 2012,
while the women would talk amongst themselves about an individual dancer’s technique or about the dances in general, the men became rather outspoken, not holding back their critiques or advice for how the dance could be improved. The elder males’ sudden passionate involvement in the song and dance affairs were viewed positively by the women participants, the motivation for which was largely driven by the desire for an emancipated Huobajie. Additionally, 2012 was the first year that male youth under the age of twenty-five participated in the dances. As one elder male stated:

“We haven’t been happy with the past few Huobajies, the officials come here and they don’t know what it’s supposed to be about, or they want Huobajie to be done their way. This year we don’t want them to come, we want to do it independently . . . Even if they do come, we’ll have a separate day of Huobajie performances without them, entirely for the Laoyaoshan people.”

On August 5, representatives from the thirteen villages met with the Qiaotou government to make the final decision on Huobajie 2012. According to informants, the villages decided collectively that they did not want the Qiaotou government to participate in 2012, despite their offer of contributing 2,000 RMB (about $333 USD). Over the next several evenings during the dance practice gatherings, the men began discussing all the details of how to manage the festival, and what they would need to purchase collectively. Each family ended up contributing 100 RMB (about $15 USD) to help purchase food, drinks, extension chords, a new microphone, and colorful flags to represent a stage area for the performers.

One serious topic of debate was where to hold the event. Many of the younger generation thought it would be easier to control the technology if they had it at the same area where they would meet to practice, a relatively central location outside of a family’s
home. Many of the middle-aged residents objected to this idea, and wished to have the Huobajie performances about one kilometer up the mountain in a vast grassland overlooking the village. Another point of consideration was whether or not two of the elders, both of whom were over the age of eighty, would be able to hike up the steep mountain to attend the event. In the end, despite the potential for technological issues, they decided that the grassland was the area that best represented Laoyaoshan, and the open space would allow for a more picturesque recording.

Figure 13. Chosen location for the 2012 Huobajie music and dance performances.

Once it became clear that Laoyaoshan would self-sponsor their 2012 Huobajie events, more and more of the young men began to participate in the dance practices. At the same time, the initial dismay expressed by the elders towards the younger girls not wearing their traditional skirts, jackets, and uofa (hats) was relieved as the girls gradually began wearing their complete outfits, not only for the dance practices, but throughout the entire day. For the first time ever in Laoyaoshan, younger children under the age of
thirteen also joined the practice sessions, dancing in a separate group to the side so as not to “disturb the older dancers who needed to focus.” Practice sessions would run between four and five hours on average, with the longest practice session lasting for over twelve hours on August 10, two days before the performance was to take place.

Figure 14. Laoyaoshan girls practicing for the 2012 Huobajie performance.

Periodically throughout the day, the girls would meet at the gathering point to learn and review dances from two DVDs, one being a DVD from Dali’s 2010 Huobajie, and the other being one I made of their 2011 Huobajie. The dance steps for the men that differ from the women in the song “Welcome,” likewise came from the Dali Huobajie DVD. Although the Laoyaoshan Huobajie 2011 DVD included full dance performances
from the neighboring villages, the girls enjoyed repeatedly watching these performances in their entirety. The only dances Laoyaoshan residents performed in 2012 that were likewise performed in 2011 were “The Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” and “July Huobajie;” they did not have any desire to attempt to learn the dances from neighboring villages. While in 2011 the very idea of performing “The Pasture of Flourishing Flowers” was highly controversial, no such discussion occurred in 2012. In fact, the song and dance was transmitted to more dancers, including the youngest generation of girls still too young to formally dance in the 2012 Huobajie performance. This implies that aside from the song itself, the Laoyaoshan community accepted all the other elements of the performance as being characteristically “Yi,” and therefore appropriate for the 2012 Laoyaoshan-exclusive Huobajie.116

In the days leading up to the August 12th Huobajie performance, the knowledge that I had the ability to record and create DVDs inspired some women members of the community to want to record other songs separate from the main performance. With the exception of the eldest woman, the grandmother of the village, all other women singers recorded during this session were those that moved to Laoyaoshan from other villages. The separately recorded performances included twelve folk songs, one example of nyop nyop hxo sung by the eldest woman in the village, and three examples of the different playing styles of the three and four-fanned mouth harp.

There were several primary reasons for wanting to record these songs separately from the August 12th performance, all of which also speak to the cultural context of gender relations within Laoyaoshan. One slightly more general reason for wanting to record separately is that genres like nyop nyop hxo and the mouth harp would not amplify
well to a large crowd; they needed to be performed without the use of a microphone. The mouth harp performer also expressed the desire to provide an explanation of the different playing style of the mouth harp, and speak to the importance of the mouth harp for continuing Nuosu traditions and sense of identity. Her explanation was better suited for a solo video that could both serve to show the different parts of the mouth harp in closer detail, and also allow her to demonstrate the different playing techniques without the interference of noise pollution that she would have faced had she recorded during the August 12th Huobajie performance (such as the echo of the amplification, and nearby people loudly socializing).

Another reason I was told some of the girls wanted to record in private was because they were otherwise too shy and nervous to perform in front of a larger audience. Thus far I have been unable to ascertain whether or not the girls were in fact too shy to sing in front of large audiences, or rather if they were too shy to sing in front of the men. Australian ethnomusicologist Catherine Ellis describes a similar experience in her research with aboriginal Australian women:

> At first the women sang (their efforts interspersed with a great deal of giggling) and the men stood by and encouraged them, and offered explanations of the songs. After only one session, the women came to me independently and asked if I would go away from the camp with them, where they could sing their secret songs to me without fear of the men overhearing.117

Although singing folksongs other than *nyop nyop hxo* was considered to be inappropriate in the years prior to 2010, there also seemed to be an exception to the rule if you were male. Why was 2012 the first year to have men included in the dances? Without a direct explanation, it appears that in Laoyaoshan dancing was seen as a more feminine
means of musical expression while singing was an activity that could be performed by both genders, though there also seemed to exist a higher expectation for the males in this regard. That is to say, I was surprised on the day of the Huobajie performances that the majority of boys (ages 11-17) singing solos were the very same boys who refused to dance during any of the nightly gatherings. While at first I took this to mean that these particular boys were too shy to dance or that they felt they had some inability to engage musically, their confident, and lively solo performances on the day of Huobajie proved otherwise. In reviewing Piao Yonggan’s analysis [Chapter II, section (iii)], the Yi have a strict mandate that men and women must remain separate in Huobajie dances. True to form, no males were included in dances that sang about Huobajie directly; the notorious popular songs with Huobajie content such as the aforementioned Yiren Zhizao’s “July Huobajie” was performed entirely by females. Therefore it is entirely likely that the historical stigma associated specifically with males’ involvement in Huobajie dances also discouraged male participation in Huobajie dance activities to a more general degree.

Thirdly, aside from the shyness of the girls, I was told that they were afraid there would not be enough time during the main event to sing all the songs they wanted to include on the DVD. This was due to a rule that some of the elder males established, saying that anyone who was dancing in the Huobajie performance could not also have a solo song time slot. While it’s true that this policy excluded some of the males involved in the dances as well, I was surprised that during the main Huobajie performance some of the girls that were too young to dance- and yet also the same age as the boys who were singing- did not perform solo songs
Lastly, some of the female singers wished to record songs taught to them by their fathers and grandfathers in separate villages whom they had not seen in years, and knew that creating this DVD and giving it to them would bring them joy and reassurance to know that their daughters and granddaughters still remembered their songs, and that they were content in their distant and notoriously harsh living environment. If the girl’s fathers and grandfathers were willing to teach them these songs, does this indicate that gender superiority is more prominent in Laoyaoshan than in other Nuosu Yi areas? Indeed, the girls were taught these songs not just so they could act as a vehicle for cultural transmission in the event that they would bear a son and teach them, but they were also taught these songs for personal practice and enjoyment. Additionally, despite the fact that most Laoyaoshan residents were born and raised there, it was not until the recording and creation of the 2012 Huobajie DVD that they first heard and learned that their neighbors and relatives had such an abundant musical repertoire and performance capabilities. It would be unrealistic for the researcher to ignore this factor as a major component contributing to musical change in Laoyaoshan, and will be addressed in further detail in Chapter IV.

(vi) Huobajie 2012: Music and Dance Analysis

The August 12th Huobajie performance included nine dances, seven songs, and an example of nyop nyop hxo performance. Along with the nyop nyop hxo performance, the songs performed on Huobajie were sung by males of all ages, the youngest of which was eleven years old. At approximately 10:30am, the nyop nyop hxo performance and interview occurred. Next there were four opening speeches, three of which were spoken
in the Yi language and one in mandarin, followed by the remainder of the musical performances. The performance program was as follows, with “solo” indicating a solo song, “dance” indicating an all-girls dance, and “group dance” indicating a dance including both boys and girls:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist/composer</th>
<th>Song Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hai Lai A Zhuo (海来阿卓)</td>
<td>“Welcome Song”</td>
<td>group dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Chu (阿楚)</td>
<td>“GeSaLuo (格萨啰)”</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Xue Liang (杨学良)</td>
<td>“Wanderer Love (游子情)”</td>
<td>dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Xue Liang (杨学良)</td>
<td>“Parting (离别)”</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Xue Liang (杨学良)</td>
<td>“The Torch’s Passion (七月火把情)”</td>
<td>dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiren Zhizao (彝人制造)</td>
<td>“July Huobajie (七月火把节)”</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang JinLaMu (央金拉姆)</td>
<td>“Pasture of Flourishing Flowers (鲜花盛开的草原)”</td>
<td>dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiao Ke (小柯)</td>
<td>“The Days Rely on Love(天赖之爱)”</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiren Zhizao (彝人制造)</td>
<td>“July Huobajie (七月火把节)”</td>
<td>dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Xue Liang (杨学良)</td>
<td>“July Huobajie (七月火把节)”</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Disco”¹¹⁸</td>
<td>group dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zang Yun Fei (藏云飞)</td>
<td>“One, Two, Three, Four (一二三四歌)”</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Disco”</td>
<td>dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Xue Liang (杨学良)</td>
<td>“Welcome Here (情来到这里)”</td>
<td>group dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei Li A Du (魅力阿都)</td>
<td>“Xiamo Girl (呷嫫阿妞)”</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Anonymous Yi melody</td>
<td>group dance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior to analyzing the August 12\textsuperscript{th} 2012 Huobajie performance, a description and analysis of several of the folksongs and \textit{nyop nyop hxo} forms recorded prior to the August 12\textsuperscript{th} Huobajie performance should be presented. The selected songs include: “Hello,” “Come Here and Dance,” “Fragrant Flower Romance Song,” “Child Jyr Jyr,” Remembering Friend Song,” along with the “Bbo Zy Zzu,” “Child Gugu,” and “Child Hlie Hlie” \textit{nyop nyop hxo} styles. These folksongs were chosen for analysis in order to present a variety of subject matter, song length, rhythmic tempo, and melodic structure. Importantly, these songs were deliberately chosen by several women in Laoyaoshan to be recorded, knowing that with the distribution of the DVD to extended families in other villages, these songs would become the known as the representative repertoire in Laoyaoshan. I hope this comparative analysis can serve as a reference for future comparisons of Yi musical norms and preferences, and the correlating thematic trends emblematic for expressing Nuosu Yi identity.

“Hello”\textsuperscript{119} is sung from one friend’s perspective, and has at least two interpretations. Firstly, the song can be interpreted as a welcome song sung for a guest visiting their village. The second interpretation is that the friend is calling out to another friend who is returning to their home village after a long absence, most likely a female who moved to her husband’s hometown after marriage.

\textbf{“Zey Muo Ge Ni”} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{“Hello”}

\textbf{A:} \hspace{1cm} This place’s sun
这里的太阳 \hspace{1cm} is this place’s support and help
是这里的支帮 \hspace{1cm} communicating hope
沟通的希望

93
The mountain peak’s moon is what makes our flower petals deep in the blooming forestry when we have them we all think of this

Our homeland the cow’s and sheep’s full moon turns

beautiful girl(s) seems as though she/they are right by your side

The lengths of our auspiciousness and satisfaction are endless hover in the blue sky illuminating for you

(Repeat C)

The “Hello” folksong is in separated into three distinct sections, comprised of an A, B, and repeating C section. The A section of “Hello” could be heard as being either in the key of C or the key of A minor. Although if perceived to be in A minor the melody would begin on the tonic, the succeeding phrases all begin with a C4 and peak at the dominant G4. On the other hand, with the exception of “材” at measure 12, all of the phrases in the A section end on what would be the dominant in the key of A minor, E4. Regardless, the key of A minor is clearly established at the end of the final phrase at measures 13-14, which outline a descending A minor triad. In looking at the melodic contour of the A section, a pattern emerges from the “是” at measure 8 to the “想” at
measure 14 ending the A section. Each phrase begins on the tonic (assuming the Key of C), rises to a higher climax pitch (G4, G4, and E4), and descends to a successively lower pitch (E4, D4, and A3). The melodic contour from measures 8-14 is an example of text depiction, in the sense that the contour is forming patterns similar to the shape of mountains. Aside from the direct link to the lyrics describing a mountain peak in measure 7, one can imagine the traveler hiking over mountain passes as other aspects of the scenery are described. The dotted rhythmic patterns also cause the rise and fall of pitches to feel more dramatic as they form mountain shapes. The traveler finally arrives on the tonic (A3) in measure 14, even more fitting as the next lyrical line cries out “our homeland” in measures 14-15.

Another example of text depiction occurs in measures 27-29 and 36-38 (both of which are lyrically and melodically the same). The “hovering in the blue” text is held on a tense subtonic scale degree (G4), only to rise to an unexpected raised tonic (A#4) on the word “sky,” as though a swift wind has suddenly lifted the bird friend higher into the air. This is followed by the largest interval leap in the entire song, as the pitch drops from the A#4 to the subdominant (D4), as if the bird is diving quickly downwards, and then lifts dramatically as the pitch rises from the subdominant (D4) up a minor 7th to the mediant (C5). The melody then finally slurs down to the tonic (A4), the bird and the melody thus both reaching a sense of stability. At first glance, one may think that the bird is a metaphor for the friend, or perhaps that the bird was the friend all along. However, according to Yi folklore the bird is a messenger that has come from another Yi village, and in this case knows the distant friend’s well being. Therefore, the singer is saying “Hello” to the bird in hopes that the bird will be able to relay the message back to her
friend upon its return trip. The singer is certain of the bird’s safe travel, expressing her
delight in the fortune of having clear weather to guide the bird’s journey to and fro.

“Come Here and Dance”\textsuperscript{121} is a short folksong sung at an average of 120BPM.
The lyrics are as follows:

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
“Tit Qie La!” & “Come Here and Dance!” \\
\hline
Ip ne wox kax ge ggep & The two of us are having all the fun \\
La tit ggep la ax li wei & Come here and play just as before \\
\hline
Ip ne wox kax ge qie & The two of us are doing all the \\
La tit qie la ax lie wei & dances \\
& Come here and dance just as \\
& before \\
Ax li ggep la biex sa & Just as before have fun and dance \\
& well \\
Ip mi tit go jox a li wei & We’re compatible, come here just as \\
& before \\
\hline
Ip ne wox kax ge qie & The two of us are doing all the \\
La tit qie la ax li wei & dances \\
& Come here and dance just as \\
& before \\
Tit ggep la! tit qie la! & Come here and have fun! Come \\
& here and dance! \\
Tit ggep la! tit qie la! & Come here and have fun! Come \\
& here and dance!\textsuperscript{122} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

Although the song’s content is ultimately happy, presenting a sense of collective
play and dance, the melody can at times invoke a feeling of uneasiness or even urgency
as the singer pleas for his/her friends to join in the festivities. At first this sense of
urgency would seem unlikely, since the melodic contour of each phrase is essentially the
same (rise, slight fall, rise, steady fall). Considering the similarity of melodic contour amongst the phrases, tension and urgency is conveyed musically by use of frequent key changes, and by periodically increasing the total melodic range throughout the song until the final stanzas.

Each phrase is two and a half measures in duration (six beats), the first beginning in E minor. Each modulation is an example of direct modulation; there are no pivot notes to change keys but rather the “tonic” of the new key begins and ends each phrase. After E minor the key changes to D major, a key signature with one additional sharp. The melody then increases the total range of the phrase by a whole step, first appearing as a gradual rise to the subtonic in E minor (E4 to D5), in D major the melody range reaches a full octave (D4 to D5). Although the highest pitch has not changed, the change in key gives the listener an impression of greater tension as the range widens before returning to the tonic (D4). The key then modulates to E major, doubling the amount of sharps to four, with a melodic range from E4 to E5. In this case the pitch range itself has not increased (still an octave range), however tension is still felt, as E5 is the highest pitch in the entire song. The first phrase in E major is also the only phrase that does not end back on the tonic, but rather on the supertonic (F4), perhaps to convey the greatest sense of urgency but also to signify that the key changes have stopped.

The entirety of “Come Here and Dance” is light-hearted, as one would expect of a dance song commonly sung by children. “Come Here and Dance” is unique in that it exemplifies how continuous pleas for others to come and join in the fun and dancing can be represented musically not only through the melodic device of subtly increasing pitch range, but also by dramatically changing the key, and thereby the mood of the song in
successive phrases. The recurrence of the phrase “just as before” also evokes a sense of continuity—these songs and dances have been preformed for years, and there’s no reason to stop now. The final repeating phrase remains in the key of E major, and has a narrower pitch range. The song ends on the tonic (E4) and conveys a more relaxed state of playfulness and continuity, as if to say: “Whether you come here to dance or not we’re still going to have fun, but you should really come join!”

Despite the title, “Fragrant Flower Romance Song” is not a love song, but rather a story similar to the one portrayed in “Hello” of a girl who is returning to her hometown village after a long absence. In this case, the fragrant flower is a metaphor for the girl herself, and is sung from the girl’s perspective. The lyrics are as follows:

“香浪漫歌”

A:
花香那过了上去
你走出理移居

 Axmo 娃挪的地处在草原

一块下！
记得节日的照火

是永远的通话

啊日子宽出的所有！
阿妈的女儿Yo!

B:
Ap syp jjo! 来 map jjo it jjo?!

“Fragrant Flower Romance Song”

Fragrant flower that passed
You moved/migrated from the ground
Mother’s baby moved to the grassland
Coming down together!
Remember that the holiday’s illuminating fire
Is the way to communicate throughout eternity
Ah the day was widened to all!
Mother’s daughter Yo!

Don’t know what you have! Come, what do you have?!!
Don’t know what you have! Come, what do you have?!!
Don’t know what you have! Come, what do you have?!!
Jjia la 毛 jjo it jjo?!  Do you have vala cape threads?

B1:
Nge liet axmo nge i go  You are mother, you are
Axmo gat dde sho lox ve  Mother the distance between us
was far
Nge liet axda nge i go  You are father, you are
Axda lat yy fa lox ve  Father gulped the brewed tea
(Repeat B)

The lyrics for “Fragrant Flower Romance Song” are particularly interesting in that they are a conglomerate of Yi and Mandarin. With the exception of several outliers, the languages are primarily separated into different sections, the A section sung in Mandarin while the B sections are sung in Yi. This style of combining languages in lyrics is a significant reflection in showing how the Yi communicate on an everyday basis, as fragments of Mandarin continue to become a more avid part of the Yi language. For example, the Yi took liberties to abbreviate and combine the words “支持” and “帮助”, which fuse together to form the text “支帮” which is not found in standard Mandarin. To the same extent, Yi words or phrases are occasionally substituted for basic Mandarin phrases, as section A shows with the use of the words “阿妈” and “Axmo,” both of which mean “mother” in this context. The lyrics present the familiar subject matter of loved ones separated over a long distance and preparing to see one another again. The lyrics also directly reference Huobajie, most likely as the purpose for which the young girl/daughter is able to return home. This reference appears in the line stating that “the holiday’s illuminating fire is the way to communicate throughout eternity,” echoes Zhu Wenxu’s concept in Chapter II, section (ii), which refers to the “10,000 year flame” as the link between generations.
The “Fragrant Flower Romance Song” begins in the key of E major, at a tempo of 100BPM. The entire A section is comprised of major pentatonic scale degree pitches, a scale which lacks the fourth and seventh scale degrees. In examining the melodic contour, the beginning of every two-measure phrase in the A section is ascending. The only exception would be the line that begins with “记得”, however the overall contour is still ascending following the brief opening neighbor tone passage (G#4-F#4-G#4). In hearing the ascending patterns, one can imagine a mother singing over a mountain pass in attempt to call to her daughter who has “moved/migrated from the ground.” This line also includes the lowest pitch in the A section, the dominant (B3), which could be representative of the “ground” or home the mother is referring to. Neighbor tones are prominent in the opening of phrases in the A section, occurring in three instances.

Following the initial ascents, there are moments of relative melodic stability before a cadence on the supertonic or dominant. The dominant (B3/B4) stands out as the most important note in the A section. The dominant is the most frequently occurring note, on average it is held for longer durations than other notes, and it is always reached by the second beat or between the second and third beat of each phrase. The upbeat rhythm and frequent leaps from the tonic (E) to the dominant (B) and vice-versa creates a sense of excitement as the mother prepares to see her daughter again after a long absence. The fourth phrase ends on the tonic (E4), confirming the conclusion of the A section.

For the B sections, the song modulates from E major to the relative minor key of C# minor, and beings on the dominant of that key (G4). The melody for the B sections follows the minor pentatonic scale, which lacks the second and sixth scale degrees. At the beginning of the B section phrases (also two measures in length), the melodic contour is
generally more stable than the A section. Initially, each melodic phrase still rises, but the full extent of the melodic range (B3-E5) is utilized and heard, giving the B sections a greater sense of movement. Despite the initial melodic ascents, the overall contour of each phrase is descending as every phrase in the B sections ends on pitch lower than it began. Every phrase in the B sections ends with a neighbor tone passage, whereas in the A section neighbor tones were prominent at the beginning of phrases. (Discuss the inverted/mirror relationship between measures 10 and 12 also need more cultural/lyrical connections with melody).

The “Child Jyr Jyr” folksong takes place from the perspective of an eagle high atop a mountain calling to a young girl named Jyr Jyr located at the foot of the mountain. According to informants, the bird is inviting Jyr Jyr to participate in a beauty competition, an event that occurs in some places during Huobajie, however there is no mention of such a competition in the lyrical content. The lyrics are as follows:

“Ax Yi Jyr Jyr”
Ax Yi Ax Yi Jyr Jyr
A ddit ba 诉 yo
Ba hmat
Pat zyr jot ddur hxi 诉 yo
Ba hmat
Pat zyr jot ddur hxi 诉
A ddit bbo hxit ni yo
Nze cyx nze!
Nga ggat bbo
Shyp njuo nit yo
Nze cyx nze
Hei~

“Child Jyr Jyr”
Child, Child Jyr Jyr
There, tell you
Notify, train you
The eagle’s wings flap, it takes flight
Notify, train you
The eagle’s wings flap, it takes flight
Look there you can see the mountain slope
So beautiful!
I’m high on the mountain top
You’re down below
So beautiful!
Hey~

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“Child Jyr Jyr” is in the key of C major, and contains the notes of the major pentatonic scale. The song begins at a moderate 76 BPM, and then switches to a more upbeat 96 BPM for the repeat (transcription measure 22). Each phrase prior to the “Hei” section ranges from 3-4 measures in length. The overall melodic contour of every phrase is descending, with a pattern of ascent, descent, ascent, and final descent. Similar to “Zey Muo Ge Ni” and “Fragrant Flower Romance Song,” the melodic contour is an example of text depiction. Each phrase begins in a higher register from the bird’s perspective, and eventually lands in a lower register, at the foot of the mountain where Jyr Jyr would be located. The contour shape gives the impression of the eagle’s call echoing off the mountainsides on the way to reaching Jyr Jyr. (ABA form). Allegedly, Ax Yi Jyr Jyr composed this song while she was herding yaks high in a mountain range, the contour thus likely influenced by the shape of the surrounding mountain slopes.

“Child Jyr Jyr” not only references the Huobajie beauty competitions, but also speaks to the importance of eagles in Nuosu culture. According to legend, the most important Yi god Chikareu was born to a woman who became impregnated when an eagle dropped three drops of blood onto her skirt. Eagles are also revered amongst the Yi as being beautiful, elegant, strong, and wise. Stating the positive traits that make the eagle especially beautiful likewise reflects the Yi’s perception of beauty in general. Acknowledging the eagle as a representative model for the ideal male and female characteristics makes the lyrical tone of “Child Jyr Jyr” both exciting and powerful as Jyr Jyr is summoned up the mountain to train for the competition. Thus the role of the eagle
as a beauty competition “trainer” is understood by the Yi as an exceptional opportunity for Jyr Jyr, one that if taken would most likely result in her winning the competition.

The “Remembering Friend Song” follows a familiar theme- separation- and this time the song is sung from the perspective of a girl whose friend is about to permanently leave their hometown village in accordance with Yi traditional Yi marriage customs. Although the lyrics and stories portrayed in “Hello” and “Fragrant Flower Romance Song” also concern separation, both have more positive connotations (lyrically and musically), as the overall theme is more about return following a long period of separation. On the other hand, the “Remembering Friend Song” deals with the moment of separation itself, and reflects the inner emotions one experiences when confronting an inevitable departure of a lifelong friend. All the Laoyaoshan residents agreed that the “Remembering Friend Song” was the saddest and most solemn song recorded for the 2012 Huobajie. The lyrics are as follows:

“Qop Ngop Chat Gu”
Qo liep jjy qo qi go
Jjy qo ap hxit te kop xi
Qo liep jjy qo qi go
Hxie mat mgu dde jji ap hxie

“Remembering Friend Song”
We are the same when we’re together, thinking of when we’re together
The time has come that we are unable to be together
We are the same when we’re together, thinking of when we’re together
The love known between friends is not at heart
To separate (our separation) is the same, I cannot think of parting
Ap jjie ap hxit te kop xi
don’t separate, the heartless/joyless
time has come

Nga nit ngop jjip ge ge sho
I think of the extremely distant
future when we will be together
again

Nga liep jjo ssy ne shut die
I will remember you forever

**B1**

| O~ A~ | Oh~ Ah~ |
| Nyuo bby hax sy xyx mu xyx | Tears are like a rainstorm pouring down |
| Xy vo ggap mop chop lox vop | My feet wander aimlessly down a remote street |

**C**

| Bbo gat | The distance between mountains |
| Lox gat | The distance between remote country sides |
| Bbo sse ggu ma gat bbo vop | We are separated by nine mountains and nine rivers |

| Jjip gga vat gga | So far away |
| Jyr mo vop mu gat bbo vop | We are separated by peace, safety, and a bountiful harvest |

**B2**

| O~ A~ | Oh~ Ah~ |
| Qop bop iex ssa iex ssa bbo | Go slowly friend |
| Nyuo bby tat bbit mu tat bbit | Tears, do not come |
| Qo liep gga ssip jjie bbo vop | Together on the street, we separate |
| Zyt liep vat ssip jjie bbo vop | Turbid water on a cliff, we separate |

The entirety of the “Remembering Friend Song” is in the key of C# minor, and has four major sections. The first A section verse begins by establishing the context, “we are the same when we are together,” meaning the singer and her friend have grown up together, known all the same people, had all the same experiences, and may even be related; in the eyes of the singer they might as well be the same person. The first phrase
begins and ends on the tonic (C#4), rising only to the dominant (G#4) in the middle. After a quite narrow melodic range in the first phrase, the range expands dramatically reaching the mediant (E5) and ending on the tonic an octave up from the original starting pitch (C#5), expressing a wail-like cry when considering that the time has come for them to separate. Over the next two phrases the melody slowly declines back to the original tonic (C#4), concluding the first verse.

The next A section verse is melodically the exact same as the first, however the theme transitions from one of togetherness, to one of realizing and accepting that separation of the two friends is inevitable. The first phrase describes the shared feeling of sorrow and loss in a powerful way as fragments of the first phrase in the first A section are repeated. The singer is still fighting the thought of having to part with her friend, and still in denial until halfway through the second verse when she states that the “the heartless/joyless time has come.” In the third phrase it becomes clear that it is not only the present time which is upsetting, but thinking of the lonesome future in which they are bound to be apart. The concluding phrase of the second verse goes so far as to indicate that the future is undetermined, and the singer is not even sure if and when they will ever see each other again. Regardless, a promise is made that their friendship will live on forever, if only in memory.

The B1 section begins by simulating a wail on an open “O” and “A” vowel. The first full lyrical phrase is a moving simile, as the singer equates her ceaseless crying to a torrential rainstorm. Yet again we see an example of equating human emotions with the natural environment. The singer then expresses how the thought of her friend’s absence causes her disillusionment and restlessness as she wanders aimlessly, and most likely
alone. The melodic contour of all of the melodic phrases in the B1 section follow the same pattern of ascent, descent, ascent, and slight final descent, with the final phrase ending on the tonic.

The lyrical text in the C section is filled with imagery, the singer conjuring up natural depictions of the path from one village to another. The line depicting nine mountains and rivers does not refer to any specific mountain range or body of water. Rather, nine is the most auspicious number in Yi culture, as Yi records indicate that the Nuosu descended from nine major families. Aside from being auspicious, the number also implies a separation of a great distance, as indicated by the following line. The melodic phrase of the “so far away” line is perhaps the most passionate in the entire song, as the mediant (E5) in the upper register is reached yet again, and sung in a louder dynamic register. The final melodic phrase ending the C section is the exact same as the final melodic phrase of the A section- a relatively low and soothing register when describing “peace, safety, and a bountiful harvest” following the previous series of melodic leaps representing a great distance of separation.

The B2 section begins with the exact same melodic and rhythmic pattern as the beginning of the B1 section. The second melodic phrase also begins on the same pitches as those in the second phrase of the B1 section, though this time the melody begins an octave higher, beginning on the dominant (G4), rising and remaining on the tonic (C5) for two beats, then likewise ending on the subdominant (F4). Analogous expressions of human emotion and the surrounding environment are also present in the concluding text in section B2. The song ends remorsefully as the moment of separation occurs, and the
The folksongs recorded in 2012 have several consistent, overarching features. With the exception of “Hello”, chromaticism is limited, and most notes fall within a pentatonic scale. Melodic phrasing is clearly important, as indicated by breath marks, pauses, or gradual ascending or descending contours. Similar to Mongolian compositional technique, the steady patterns of the melodic contours often form the shape of mountains, which in some cases may have inspired the shape of the melody itself. The lyrical text reflects the melody, with emotions ranging from happiness, sorrow, excitement, anxiety, and nostalgia. Imagery and movement are both vital components present in each example above. Metaphors, similes, and personification literary techniques are all utilized to equate feelings and actions with the natural environment- an essential aspect of Yi cosmological understanding. Examples of movement and space are also always present. In some instances it’s a matter of short distance, such as children standing aside reluctant to dance and play or Ax Yi Jyr Jyr being summoned up a mountain. Other times movement is described in terms of long distances, or contexts of separation, departure, and return. Although the songs analyzed are just a selection of the folksongs recorded for the 2012 DVD, they present an array of melodic and lyrical features that are potentially comparable with future resources and recordings. Most importantly, the folksongs highlight the values, beliefs, and concerns of the NuosuYi in general, and with the spread of the DVD to other villages they are now representative of the Laoyaoshan community.
According to the Yi in Laoyaoshan, there are over thirty different styles of *nyop nyop hxo*, and recently more styles have emerged in Liangshan. Women sing in a mid to low vocal range and men sing in a higher vocal range. This *nyop nyop hxo* singing style and the sonic vocal sound itself reflects and reifies Nuosu societal conventions, instilling the belief that men are superior to women. Therefore men’s social positions, and singing voices, are likewise higher than women’s and vice-versa. This provides an interesting contrast to Jane Sugarman’s experience with the Prespa Albanians. The women sing in a high tessitura with a muted, nasal placement, which is considered to present a feminine sound, while males sing in a medium tessitura with greater tensing of the throat muscles to represent strength and masculinity. 130 *Nyop nyop hxo* is mostly improvised, though there are some styles where lyrical precision is so important, if one does not know the final verse or how to properly conclude a song, they should not attempt to sing the form at all. 131 Each *nyop nyop hxo* phrase or verse must contain at least four words, the only exception being the (two-syllable) word “Axmo,” meaning mother.

Apart from the sonic and lyrical components, examining *nyop nyop hxo* performance practice also provides insight into other Nuosu cultural values. Although the Bbo Zy Zzu style was not performed during Huobajie, it is likely the most important and well known of all the *nyop nyop hxo* forms as it must be performed during wedding ceremonies and New Year’s holiday gatherings. *Nyop nyop hxo* singing occurs when family members, friends, and guests sit and form a semi-circle around the fire pit in a Nuosu home, with the hierarchal seating ordered according to status and prescribed social customs.
The hierarchy begins in the north section of the home and runs counterclockwise. Males sit in a line from the northeast corner of the home, generally in order from eldest to youngest, followed by the women who sit closer to the door to the west, while guests sit along the south wall. It is up to the males to start a *nyop nyop hxo* session, and the women can join in after the first performance. Occasionally two men may even “take the stage” by standing in the area where the women usually sit to the west to dance and sing, sometimes in competitive fashion. Men *must* be wearing a Nuosu vala cape in order to perform. During a New Year’s gathering, however, the guests are expected to be the first to sing, followed by the male host(s) sitting across on the north side. The Bbo Zy Zzu style of *nyop nyop hxo* allows individuals to display their poetic
knowledge and musical skill, and also serves to formally reify socio-cultural norms in a communal setting.

For the 2012 Huobajie DVD, the grandmother (eldest female) in Laoyaoshan sang in the female-specific “Child Gugu” nyop nyop hxo style. The “Child Gugu” style is sung from a mother’s perspective singing to her daughter who has moved to a distant village to marry. The names of all nyop nyop hxo styles are indicated as the first words in the opening stanza, in this case the grandmother begins the first phrase by calling “Child Gugu (Ax Yi Gugu). Embedding the style name in the lyrics allows listeners to immediately acknowledge which style is being performed, and also instills the style type in one’s memory to help with the oral transmission process. In addition, Gugu is the name of the woman believed to have composed and developed the style; the same is true for male-specific styles such as “Child Hlie Hlie”. The lyrical content of the “Child Gugu” style focuses entirely on the Nuosu clothing attire the mother owns for both herself, and for her daughter. The mother is telling her daughter “I have four hats, four pairs of earrings, four silver collar plates, four suits, and four skirts, two are my own, and two of which I will give to you.”

Of the original eight brothers that are called the grandfathers of upper Laoyaoshan village, only two are still alive- the second oldest and the sixth oldest. The elder brother performed his nyop nyop hxo on August 12, 2012, the day of the Huobajie performances. The man’s nyop nyop hxo was the first activity of the day, taking place even before the opening speeches. This pattern seems to correlate with the Bbo Zy Zzu form in the sense that prior to any other musical activity, the eldest male should begin by singing a nyop
nyop hxo. The elder brother improvised in the “Child Hlie Hlie” style, the lyrics translated to me as follows:

Child Hlie Hlie
I am a man, this is an elder’s song
Today we’re all so happy
After I leave, how will the youth have reunions?
I hand over the culture and traditions to you
On this day and forever after

Generations over the age of about thirty-five were especially moved by the performance, whereas the younger generations needed a translation and explanation of most of the lyrics. In nyop nyop hxo performance one also displays their literary knowledge and talents, leaving younger generations of Nuosu who are being increasingly acculturated into Han institutional systems with many questions about their own language.

Directly following the “Child Hlie Hlie” nyop nyop hxo, the younger grandfather gave a short speech:

Today, we celebrate Huobajie under Haba Mountain. I am so happy! This year’s Huobajie is different, but very good; everyone has come to participate—even a foreigner! Originally there were eight elders, now we’re down to only two. I say now as my brother said in his nyop nyop hxo: young people remember this day, and make sure every Huobajie after this is the same!

After the elder’s speech, the 2012 Huobajie activities began. Apart from the second rendition of “Disco” directly followed by “Welcome Here”, the Huobajie performances alternated every other slot with a solo vocal and dance performance. Of the sixteen performances (not including the nyop nyop hxo), ten (62.5%) were by songs recorded by Yi performers or contained Yi lyrics, four (25%) were songs recorded by
Han performers with Mandarin lyrics, and two (12.5%) were songs recorded by Tibetan performers with Tibetan lyrics. In 2012, the Laoyaoshan residents prepared more than five times as many performances for Huobajie compared to 2011. Two of the songs were repeated within the 2012 program: Yiren Zhizao’s “July Huobajie” and “Disco”. “July Huobajie” was performed once as a solo vocal performance, and once as an all-girls dance. The first rendition of “Disco” was performed as a group dance, including not only the males that were participating in the other group dances, but also one boy and two girls who were considered to be too young to dance with the others. The girls then performed the “Disco” dance exclusively, indicating that they viewed themselves as superior performers to the males.

For the most part, the boys and girls dance movements are the exact same for the group dance numbers. However an exception is found in the first performance, “Welcome Song” (see appendix H). The dance movement takes place during the refrain, and occurs a total of four times at 0:36, 1:23, 2:12, and 2:58. During the refrain, the girls perform the same “crane” movement as seen during the previously analyzed percussion solo in “July Huobajie”. This is the movement in which the dancer’s arms are by her side and she alternately raises them to mimic the crane’s wings. Meanwhile, the males perform slightly different “herding” movement than the one seen in “Pasture of Flourishing Flowers”. The “herding” movement in “Welcome Song” involves stepping to either the right or left side, while the dancer’s arms stay at about waist level and swiftly shift in front of him/her. This same “herding” movement occurs frequently in “Welcome Here”, where it is performed by both males and females. The only other difference between the male and female performance is the bowing technique. The girls end a dance
by facing towards the audience, and performing the “flower blossoming” movement with their knees slightly bent. The males on the other hand, raise both arms directly up in the air on the final beat, without their knees bent.

The final 2012 Huobajie event was a group dance that included every member of the Laoyaoshan community, with the exception of the eldest. The group held hands and formed a circle divided by males and females, and gradually moved counterclockwise. Similar to the *nyop nyop hxo* seating fashion, all the women gathered together towards the West end of the circle.

Figure 16. Laoyaoshan residents performing the final circle dance. \(^{137}\)

The group dance finale was a perfect conclusion to represent the communal spirit of the 2012 Huobajie festivities. Upon descending down the mountain back to my host’s residence I was immediately asked to create a DVD of the performance. After the completion of the DVD around midday, the DVD played on repeat until 5am while
guests periodically stopped by to eat, drink, and socialize. The cheerful atmosphere amongst the Laoyaoshan people presented a complete contrast to the rather solemn evening following the 2011 Huobajie performances. As people continuously requested that I make copies of the DVD to give to their extended family and friends, it became clear that the Laoyaoshan people were proud to have independently created a product that represented their community and newly thriving musical culture.
Chapter V: Concepts and Theories Regarding Musical Change

(i) Constructing and Performing Identity

Anthropologist Erik Mueggler’s article Dancing Fools: Politics of Culture and Place in a Traditional Nationality Festival documents the issues surrounding changes to the environment, ritual, and process of a Chuxiong (White) Yi annual Clothing Competition Festival. Mueggler states how historically the purpose of having music and dance during the Clothing Competition Festival was a ceremonial practice known as Yeho no, restoring or welcoming a wandering soul to avoid their feelings of sadness or loneliness. Many of the festival procedures were outlined in bimo texts, including the specific location in which the festival should take place. Mueggler states generally that with wider recognition of a festival or ceremony comes both money and officials, as was certainly the case with Laoyaoshan’s Huobajie. The addition of such elements also implies that changes will occur, both with the people involved in holding the festival and the festival itself.

Mueggler describes in great detail the struggle and negotiation process between the Chuxiong Yi residents and the district culture bureau regarding the location and overall meaning of the festival, and how it would be promoted to outside observers. The main concern for the bureau officials was finding a way to promote the festival as more of a secular event, something that could be both relatable and noncontroversial to the mandates of Han society. The “struggle” era Mueggler describes spanned the course of several decades, during which various features of the Clothing Competition Festival’s values and practices were in constant flux. Both the Yi and the Han officials needed to
defend the reasons for holding the festival in a specific location with reference to past practices, and thus Yi legends were written and adjusted in Mandarin to create a sense of historical relevance for decision-making. Mueggler asserts that when questioning the reasoning and supposed legitimacy associated with cultural performance between minority and majority groups, oftentimes it is the action of the performance itself, even if recently invented, that provides groundwork for eventual approval.

To this extent Mueggler states that scholars involved in the field of Asian studies and anthropology need:

A method of inquiry that understands cultural action to be the deployment of systems of representations or discourses in interlocking struggles over the “making and remaking of identities” . . . methods that can take seriously the intimate relationships between body and place and can understand the ways these intimacies articulate with the vast abstractions of state and nation.

Indeed, after the 2011 Huobajie experience, the residents in Laoyaoshan realized the new all-inclusive approach that the Qiaotou government promoted was affecting various elements that extended beyond just the mere festival; the changes implemented were an attempt to reshape the very identity of the Laoyaoshan Yi. This explains why in 2012 when the Laoyaoshan residents were in charge of hosting Huobajie themselves, factors such as choosing the most appropriate location for the performances were of utmost importance. The 2010 and 2011 Huobajie contexts both highlighted elements related to space, language, and sound that were never previously a subject of debate [discussed further in section (ii)]. Similar to Harrell’s explanation for why women in Mishi never felt the need to wear Nuosu clothing [Chapter I section (vi)], every area in
Laoyaoshan was unquestionably Nuosu, and therefore it was not until outsiders began participating in the Huobajie activities that proper representation became an issue. With the opening speeches and structure of the 2011 Huobajie, it became clear that the Laoyaoshan Yi were no longer only representing themselves, they were integrated into a much larger realm; suddenly the Laoyaoshan Yi were deemed representatives of the Chinese nation.

The process of recontextualizing Huobajie to fit a model of extended representation has been occurring in Yi regions throughout China for decades, as exemplified by a quote in Mueggler’s article:

All can now clearly see that the Yi people have contributed more to human society than mushrooms, wood fungus, goat skins, and shredded radish!” proclaimed Chuxiong’s minister of propaganda at the prefecture’s first officially sponsored Fire Torch Festival in 1984... "Mystical and splendid legends of great literary value," had demonstrated that "Yi culture and science have had great influence on government, economics, philosophy, astronomy, geography, medicine, literature, and art within the nation and beyond.”

Evidently, some regions such as Chuxiong perceive an integrated Huobajie to be an opportunity for enhancing their status as a minority group to the larger Chinese society. Mueggler discusses at length how minority groups such as the Yi are thinking strategically about how to apply and promote their culture, participating in “the self-reflexive symbolic activity of cultural politics, taking an external view of themselves.” Anthropologist Martin Stokes makes a similar remark in terms of a minority group’s role as perceived by a dominant group:
Ethnicities are rather like classes in this respect; frequently they are defined or excluded in terms of the classificatory systems of the dominant group whose guiding motive is the control and cooption of potentially problematic 'others'. Neither ethnicities nor class subcultures can operate outside this control. Frequently they have to define themselves within dominant classifications. 143

In other words, it is no longer a simple dichotomy limited to 'us' and 'them,' but rather there is a third identity involved from the perspective of minority groups in China—an identity that could be referred to as the 'us in the eyes of them.' While this third identity may have existed in some form previously with the implementation of the tusi system, ever since features of Yi culture started becoming included as a representative minority of mainstream Chinese society (beginning in the 1950s and certainly by the 1980s) the Nuosu had to learn what features would or would not be acceptable cultural assets. To my knowledge, specifics of the appropriation process are largely undocumented. Therefore the amount of control the Yi had in the decision-making process for what elements of their culture would be promoted and spread to other regions is unknown. Still, as the Nuosu began increasingly encountering Han and other Chinese citizens with a limited, mixed, or inaccurate understanding of Yi culture, the realization that all branches of Yi would be prescribed with having conglomerate beliefs despite their intra-ethnic differences led to the 'us in the eyes of them' identity mentioned above.

On the surface, some may see such expansion as a form of progress, and may even feel proud that their cultural practice is being acknowledged as a vital component to human development. In reality, what occurs is a stream of addition and loss to the cultural tradition, and it is up to the people of each region to negotiate and decide what elements they are willing to change, include, or even sacrifice. The factors that will be
seen as negative or advantageous, necessary or supplementary can only be determined through trial and error in the deployment of cultural action and performance. Adhering to or rejecting external demands shapes a group’s identity no matter what the outcome, but tracking these changes as they occur along the way provides a history, a testament to when and why those changes occurred at all. As long as the conditions for why changes occurred are remembered, there can always be further negotiation, and as Laoyaoshan exemplified in 2012, restoration of the cultural event’s form based on previous values is always an option.

(ii) The Process of Change in Laoyaoshan’s Huobajie 2011-2012

In further examining the method of introducing new music and meanings to the Huobajie festival in Laoyaoshan in 2011, and it’s impact on the locals in making decisions for 2012, I will refer to three primary theoretical approaches - the symbolic-interpretive, the structural, and the cognitive-linguistic. Although these approaches are typically drawn upon in the field of linguistics, Stevan Feld also draws upon them in his book, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*.144 These theoretical approaches will show not only the process of how the new music was embedded into the 2011 Huobajie performance, but will also assess the ‘perplexed’ state of the Yi in 2011 in using vocabulary such as “stranger (mosheng 陌生)” to describe the musical repertoire and events.

Firstly, changes were made to the musical product, the musical repertoire itself. In the case of Laoyaoshan’s Huobajie 2011, one significant change was requiring the performance of the Tibetan pop song “Flame,” the lyrics of which are in Mandarin. In
order to directly alter the prescribed meanings of Huobajie understood by the Yi as fitting their symbolic-interpretative cultural ideals, the subject material of the change in repertoire still needed to be one that reflected some element of the holiday’s significance. Thus “Flame,” a Tibetan pop song about love, was selectable due to its symbolic imagery corresponding with the “fire” theme, despite the flame in this context being a metaphor for love and passion rather than the mythic bridge between generations and the world of the living and the deceased. Transforming this subjective, fundamental analogy in Yi cosmology to one of a more generic interpretation understandable to a wider audience was the first key factor to integrate new music into the Laoyaoshan community.

Secondly, the structural approach comes into play. Once there was knowledge of a change to the product, a behavioral response then ensued to meet the standards of the new requirements. The village that performed “Flame” learned Tibetan dance movements, and some girls participating wore Tibetan clothing instead of their Nuosu garments. By incorporating Tibetan songs into the Huobajie schedule of events, these surrounding structural changes in form and appearance likewise occurred. Therefore the structural movement and sound elements representing the underlying meanings of Huobajie were altered to the point where if a Nuosu Yi were to watch a recording of the performance out of context, they would be unable to identify the performance as one normally associated with Huobajie.

Following the performance of “Flame” in this context was the reflection and conceptualization of what those changes meant to the cultural group. At this point, the Yi began asking themselves how such changes may have recontextualized the significance
of the musical event and reshaped the identity of the people involved. In describing the
cognitive-linguistic ideational approach, Feld also refers to Stephen Tyler, stating:

“Cultures are not material phenomena; they are cognitive
organizations of material phenomena” (Tyler 1969; 3).” These
cognitive organizations are studied through naming behavior or
lack of it, and this behavior is assumed to be the imposition of
cultural order onto perception and conception.¹⁴⁵

Considering Feld’s quote above, this makes the fact that the Nuosu described the
performance behaviors of the 2011 Huobajie as a “stranger” all the more impactful. The
Yi recognized the songs and dance forms separately as Tibetan, but were assertive and
deliberate in telling me as an unknowing foreign guest that the performance I was
witnessing was unusual; these songs and dances were not the quintessential
representative features of a Huobajie they had previously experienced. The lack of verbal
articulation for what was occurring and the grievances expressed thereafter are significant
in that they reflect the degree of perplexity many members of the Laoyaoshan community
felt about the 2011 Huobajie performances. Of course this perplexity was intensified due
to the ironic fact that musical practice in the daily life of Upper Laoyaoshan residents had
such a short existence. The festival was both theirs in the sense that the participants were
members of their community, and yet not theirs in the sense that the musical repertoire
and dance movements, and associated symbols (fire and dress) had been altered to the
point where the Yi’s subjective understanding of the meaning and significance of
Huobajie was likewise distorted. In an attempt to guarantee the continuity of such
integrative changes, monetarily rewarding the groups who changed their behavior to
adapt to these circumstances was a final means by the Qiaotou officials to publicly assure
the Yi that these alterations were positive representations of Huobajie. It was only on the evening following the 2011 Huobajie performance (and continuing throughout the next year) that members of the Upper Laoyaoshan community gathered and began to share and articulate their discontent regarding the integration of foreign elements into their musical performance. Thus it appears that the cognitive response, the debate over what such integration meant and would mean for the future of Nuosu culture, was the final factor that would eventually determine what aspects of the 2011 Huobajie were culturally acceptable for continuation in the years to come.

However, the introductions and changes to the structure were not entirely viewed as negative. A change that was considered to be positive in 2011 was the introduction of amplification technology. As far as I know, the residents of Laoyaoshan had not previously considered using microphones and speakers to amplify their singing and dancing performances. Once the Qiaotou officials introduced these devices, the Laoyaoshan people were suddenly in charge of operating the foreign equipment, the behavior therefore attempting to meet the newly established sonic standard. The decision was then made independently in 2012 to include amplification, evidence that the idea of using these materials for their own benefit had entered their conceptualization. In terms of the cognitive-linguistic approach, the names of the specific types of equipment needed and discussing their use became an avid point of consideration for the Yi in 2012. Thus the implementation of new elements to the 2011 Huobajie benefited both groups involved. The dominant group, in this case the Qiaotou officials extending to the larger Chinese nation, were able to absorb elements of a minority festival and market it as a product of national identity, while the Yi minority group incorporated the newly introduced
knowledge and technology of the dominant group (in somewhat of a bricolage fashion), thereby expanding the soundscape and repertoire possible to perform. In essence, the response on the part of the Yi demonstrates the constant negotiation that takes place in such complex situations between an economically and politically dominant and minority group. For the Laoyaoshan Yi, the conflict of agency and control is acted out through the annual performance of Huobajie. This case study exemplifies how when the values of a minority group are put under pressure by an external group via change to preexisting customs or the introduction of entirely new elements, these actions spark a dialogue within the challenged group that can lead to cultural maintenance, revival, or adaptation.

(ii) Correlations Between Laoyaoshan and Previous Case Studies

Many examples of hybridity and musical change exist in regions where colonization occurred and new music and cultural practices are introduced, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia. Reviewing previous instances of externally derived musical change can highlight correlations with the case of Laoyaoshan, and can additionally exemplify overarching features of musical change processes in general. John Kaemmer discusses the relationship between musical change and social power amongst the Shona people in Zimbabwe, another example of externally influenced change. When white settlers came to Shona regions in 1890, the communal work division became appreciated based on salary, and the status of local religious leaders became devalued. As local religion continued to be replaced by Christianity, which held ultimate power politically and economically, chieftainship songs and praise songs fell to disuse.
However, similar to the Yi in Laoyaoshan, the 1970s saw a return to ethnic awareness and thus traditional music revival as the Shona began playing the ancestral mbira as opposed to guitar. The frequency of which songs and repertoires were performed thus both shaped and reflected the perception of what type of music Shona people considered to be the norm in their society. As Kaemmer states, “Changing frequency is observable through changes in music complexes, the institutionalized types of events at which cognitive and social processes generate musical performances.”

Kaemmer’s observations correspond with the concerns of the elders in Laoyaoshan that the relative frequency of foreign musical elements in Huobajie performances would appear to the youth as being normal features of the Yi societal customs. The generational gap between the youth and the elders in Laoyaoshan is already present in various forms within society [Chapter II section (iv)]. Moreover, changing the conceptualization of what musical forms are acceptable and appropriate for major representative customs such as Huobajie is a significant means for the dominant group to consolidate power in a region that is otherwise quite far removed from the idea of assimilating to their values. Kaemmer’s example of the Shona in Zimbabwe exemplifies how musical and thus traditional cultural revival is still possible even after decades of social and conceptual changes within a group, and that the role of frequency of performance is an essential factor for shaping those conceptual norms and changes.

Lorraine Aragon presents a similar example of musical change resulting from shifts in religious belief and practice in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Prior to the influence of Dutch Protestant missionaries and Islam, indigenous regions performed a genre of folk song known as raego, which was associated with religious rites, social
hierarchy, and community fertility. While constraints on the song and dance form began in the early twentieth century due to the dance involving close physical contact and lyrical content regarding fertility, the dance was formally banned by the 1970s. Along with the pressure from missionaries to restrict the raego performances, pre-colonial raego lyrics utilized highly literary text and even incorporated “nonsense” syllables—text borrowed from other regions. The relative lyrical obscurity and the fact that shaman leaders composed them also aided the genre’s demise, and is a fate that the Nuosu nyop nyop hxo form could likewise experience if preservation means are not established soon. Ensuring nyop nyop hxo’s continuity will require both a greater frequency of performances, and perhaps a more diligent means of oral transmission involving careful explanation of lyrical content, form, and the aesthetics of melodic improvisation.

The raego genre has since been revived, though the dance movements are limited to single line-dance fashion. According to Aragon, despite the fact that Protestant missionaries suppressed the genre’s performance, the sentiments associated with raego remained the same after a forty-year absence of observation. The raego case is thus also an example in which a dominant group imposed new standards onto a less dominant group, as the sound and structure of the form was altered (gradually limited and then later forbidden) in hopes of ultimately changing the social norms and values of the Indonesian society. However, raego’s continued capability to “bring tears to the eyes of the most staunch indigenous Protestant minister” is evidence that while features of the sound product and structure of the form may have changed, the conceptualization of what raego means both religiously and historically to the community remains the same. Similar to the Laoyaoshan Yi’s response to having to perform a dance to “Pasture of Flourishing
Flowers,” adhering to external demands by a dominant group while still maintaining the most valued cultural aspects of an event through clever negotiation may be the answer for a minority group worried about the survival of a cultural belief or practice. Therefore, even under contrived circumstances such as changing the dance form and false meaning promoted to a wider audience as authentic, the spread and frequent performance of a music is what can revive and give power to an ethnic group under external control; music confirms and reifies their sense of identity.

Another example of syncretism is Ghanaian highlife music, which incorporates instruments such as the bugel, the flugelhorn, the harmonica, the accordion, and the harmonium brought by colonizing sailors, soldiers, and missionaries. The instruments were first seen being played in bars where the music came to be known as light palm-wine music. Local musicians then adopted the instruments and applied their own playing techniques, like the plucking methods of the sanza (plucked metallophone). Along with the local playing techniques, melodies from the osibi percussion-based dance of the Akan people fused with jazz modes, forming the popular highlife genre. Although highlife began with the direct musical influence of adopting Western instruments, the genre continued to “localize” as it spread to various regions and ethnic groups. The localization process involved the addition of traditional instruments, such as the Yoruba talking drum used for initiation rites. Such changes spawned a new style of juju music, which continued to combine modern acoustic technology with elements of local sacred customs and rhythmic traditions.

The highlife genre presents an interesting example of how oppressed groups can adopt and adapt musically to changing conditions within society. Once an instrument
introduced from outside becomes an avid part of a region’s soundscape, the instrument, melodic features, and form all have the potential to be adopted by the local people. Choices are then made on the part of the performers based on what elements are likely to be acceptable within the group based on the current value system. While highlife musicians made use of the newly introduced instruments’ sound potential, an increased accessibility to music in Laoyaoshan from VCDs and contact with other groups in neighboring regions (particularly amongst the youth who go to boarding school) leads to an increased awareness of both Yi and ‘other’ popular songs available for listening and/or performance. I have witnessed this process occurring in Xichang, the capital city of Liangshan, where Yi musicians are playing rock music with electric guitars and drum sets, but also incorporating the *dizi* flute and singing with Yi lyrics. Since there are currently no musicians in Laoyaoshan proficient in playing an instrument other than the mouth harp, the most likely form of fusion that may be seen in the coming years would be karaoke-style singing while dancers perform simultaneously.
VI. Conclusions

The case study of Laoyaoshan’s Huobajie performances demonstrates a people’s realization of the power and influence music can have for defining a cultural group when put under pressure by an external, politically dominant group. While more extreme measures of assimilation to Han political ideals were enforced during the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) to directly change indigenous societal structures and beliefs of the Yi and other minority groups, the methods implemented in the twenty-first century depict a more subtle process of changing the exterior symbols that are representative of that minority group’s cultural values. As anthropologist Gregory Acciaoli states, “regional diversity is valued, honoured, even apotheosized, but only as long as it remains at the level of display, not belief, performance, or enactment.”151 By gradually changing the structural presentation and symbolic-interpretative features of an event, the dialogue and understanding about what the event means to the group is likewise altered. The recontextualization and commodification of a minority group’s cultural values in spectacle form gives legitimacy to the illusion of a unified nation that promotes development, inclusivity, and perhaps the most important features of all-happiness and contentment.

In instances such as Laoyaoshan’s Huobajie and the raego of Central Sulawesi where new music is introduced, the negotiation tactics enacted through performance in the years directly following the enforcement are perhaps the most revealing for measuring the degree to which alterations are taking place within a cultural group. Now that a majority of the youth in Laoyaoshan are sent to boarding schools and becoming
evermore acculturated into Han standards of speaking, acting, and thinking, maintaining and passing on the significance of cultural practices is crucial to lessen the conceptual gaps between generations. On the other hand, the Yi of Laoyaoshan are in a unique position to negotiate, or in the case of 2012 completely reject external participation due to the natural boundaries of their environment still largely separating the majority of their society from outside influences.

A great irony is also present in that while the Laoyaoshan Yi are quick to negatively judge and reject most foreign objects and ideals, with the exception of several nyop nyop hxo singers the entirety of Laoyaoshan’s musical repertoire comes from external sources: the three wives who migrated from other villages and VCD/DVD recordings of other Yi dancers. When the very identity of the Nuosu Yi is at stake, concessions can be made to look to external, yet related neighboring groups for influence. Promoting the Nuosu of Laoyaoshan as an exemplary player on the stage of national development thus opened the conceptual understanding of who then could be considered an insider; shifting from a subjective to an objective lens of self-perception. This conceptual shift, one from locale-specific focus to one of extended ethnic comradery, changed the criteria for what was acceptable by the Laoyaoshan community as music that was representative of their people.

The result was a sort of cultural awakening, a deliberate sense of investigation on the part of the Laoyaoshan Yi to find a way to represent themselves independently. This strategy was successfully carried out through performing and recording the songs and dances in 2012, as the Yi yet again recontextualized their identity by establishing and instilling a new standard criteria for what their musical values are and should continue to
be. Considering the lack of musical activity prior to the Qiaotou government’s involvement in 2010, it is unlikely that such awareness would have occurred without external participation, pressure, and the introduction of technology for expanding and enhancing performance capabilities. There are many topics related to Yi music and culture worthy of future research. For instance, analyzing the playing patterns of the hxo hxo mouth harp and how they relate to human speech and function as an expression of identity; the nyop nyop hxo forms, melodic structures, and the improvisational compositional process of performers; and of course, continued research and documentation of the Huobajie festival in Laoyaoshan.

It is possible that the Qiaotou government involvement in 2011 provided just enough influence to inspire the Laoyaoshan community to independently develop their musical performance to an internally satisfactory state, and the government may remain absent for years to come. However, as Aragon, Harnish, Kaemmer, and Mueggler all attest, negotiating musical and social changes between minority and majority groups is an unending process, and one of great emotional and influential significance. Music, like all facets of human life, is not stagnant; change is inevitable. Documenting the course of events and the details of how decision-making processes transpired is essential for interpreting what changes have occurred to a music and/or dance performance and why. Furthermore, such analysis can provide a basis for both predicting and understanding future musical change potential within any given cultural group.
Endnotes

1 The names of all specific places and people have been changed to ensure the security of the informants involved with this project.


5 Ibid.


8 Photograph taken by Alex Minkin, October 2012.

9 Photograph taken by Jonathan Richter, June 2012.

10 Photograph taken by Jonathan Richter, June 2012.


14 Photograph taken by Katherine Richter, July 2012.

15 This response was in the Mandarin equivalent of “bu hui 不会” rather than “bu neng 不能,” indicating that they were not only unable to dance, but physically inept at doing so.

16 Nyop nyop hxo will be further examined in Chapter III, section (vi).

17 Sugarman, Jane C. "The Nightingale and the Partridge: Singing and Gender among Prespa Albanians." Ethnomusicology 33.2 (1989): 191-215. The Prespa Albanians share another similar gender trait with the Nuosu in that the colors of their pleated skirts change to represent loss of fertility.

18 Other Laoyaoshan families gather around the fire and place their bowls on the floor in front of them.

19 However, if married women do participate in the dance, they do not wear their head garments.

20 Although the song was popularized by Yiren Zhizao, the music was composed by Jike Qubu (吉克曲布) with lyrics by Chen Xiao Qi (陈小奇). A musical analysis will be
provided in section III. “July Huobajie” music video link: 
http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/4yrE7hOt_41/.

21 吉狄康师. “Whether You Want to Drink or Not” music video link: 
http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XOTcONjAOMA=.html.

22 海来阿卓. “Gesaluo” music video link: 
http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/uc1pbJBLID/. 


32 Ibid, p.5.


36 There are also less definitive branches of Yi in Yunnan and Guizhou known as the “Red” Yi and the “Yellow” Yi.

37 A process known in Mandarin Chinese as gaitu guiliu, or “replacing the local and restoring the posted officials.”


Just as the Yi themselves are extremely diverse, so are their legends, rituals, and fundamental religious customs. The specific beliefs of the Nuosu in Laoyaoshan will be examined in greater detail in chapter 2.


Ibid, p.46.


There have been efforts to transmit the written script in primary schools in areas of the Liangshan Prefecture since the early 1990s.


In Yunnan, at least 38 self-identifying census group applicants were included into the “Yi” category. Mullaney, Thomas F. “Seeing for the state: the role of social scientists in China’s ethnic classification project.” *Asian Ethnicity,* 11:3, (2010), 325-342.


Math is allegedly the most challenging subject, and is therefore the subject most commonly taught in the Nuosu language.


Ibid, p.121.

Piao, Yongguang.

Ibid.


Piao, Yongguang. p.4.


Ibid, p.5.


In earlier times a three-stone foundation called galy was used.


Ibid.

Ibid, p.6 (author’s translation).
A type of buckwheat pancake that is a popular dietary staple of the Yi, especially during Huobajie.


As an outsider I was not allowed to observe these ceremonial activities. The following is a description based on the information I received from informants. I do not want to include too much detail regarding the intricacies of this portion of the ceremony, as they are both deeply personal and rather secretive procedures to the Yi in the region.

This may also have to do with the fact that the Yi word va pu is translated as “white chicken,” and could therefore potentially offend the god or at least be somewhat contradictory.

Mandarin title: “鲜花盛开的草原”.

Photograph taken by Jonathan Richter, July 2011.

Author’s translation.


Transcription in Appendix A.

For instance, if a dancer is facing right, then the left arm is raised at approximately 90°, bending at the elbow.

(杨学良). Music video link:


Bohlman, Phillip Vilas. “The land where two streams flow”: music in the German-
Jewish community of Israel. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

106 One such example is Hai Lai A Zhou’s “Big Sister (姐姐),” which is also the title of her 2012 debut album.


108 Ibid, p.124


111 Such revolts include the Tibetan Uprising in 1959 (also known as the Khamba uprising), and the lesser-known Sichuan-Chamdo rebellion officially suppressed in 1956.


113 Screenshot of a video recording by Jonathan Richter, August 2012.

114 This particular comment came from the father of the household at which the dance practices took place, and caused some of the younger children to break into tears. This instance expressed both the level of seriousness of wanting Huobajie to run as smoothly as possible, and also the newfound interest and emotional connection that the youngest generation felt towards music, dance, and their sense of community involvement.

115 Photograph taken by Jonathan Richter, August 2012.

116 Further discussion regarding this decision will appear in Chapter IV.


118 I was unable to find information about the “Disco” number, but the song includes synthsizers and electronic drum kits, and the song resembles a modern day square dance piece one would hear in the West.

119 See Appendix C.

120 Author’s translation.

121 See Appendix D.

122 Author’s translation.

123 See Appendix E.

124 Author’s translation.

125 See Appendix F.

126 Author’s translation.

127 See Appendix G.

128 This is why many Yi villages take the name “九龙”, meaning nine dragons.

129 I say the text reflects the melody as according to informants and the quote in Chapter II, section (iii), which claims that in terms of composition, text follows the melody.


131 This is true of a style which can be heard on Ma Guo Guo's album: "Kou Xian Qing Sheng (口弦情声)".

132 The seating arrangement does not always have to begin with male elders sitting to the north. Rather, the host will sit on the same side of the home as the hinges of the front door. Therefore, the seating custom can be interpreted as the hosts holding the door open for guests, who likewise are always looking at the open exit if the door is ajar.
Translation paraphrased by informant.

This was also true for the grandmother’s lyrics.

In fact, the language the grandfather used was so old that many of the younger generation mistook some of the lyrics to be referring to “barley and bamboo,” a vastly different and irrelevant meaning from the other lyrical content.

Translation paraphrased by informant.

Screenshot of a video recording by Jonathan Richter, August 2012.


Ibid, p.16.

Ibid, p.35.


Ibid, p.5.


Ibid, p.16.

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Glossary

Bbusse- Yi term for panpipes.

Bicy Bimosse – The hereditary transmission process of inheriting the Bimo status.

Bimo – Yi shaman priest.

Bipu – Book of Yi genealogical records.

Cyvi – Yi term for familial clan.

Dizi (笛子) – Chinese term for bamboo flute.

Douhuowu (都火舞) – Dance form and custom associated with Huobajie.

Erxian/Fusse (二弦) – Chinese and Yi term for a two stringed bowed fiddle.

Gaige kaifang (改革开放) – Open up and Reform era under Deng Xiao Ping.

Gamo Anyop – Yi epic depicting a heroic protagonist.

Gaxy – Yi term for the slave class in the former caste society.

Guvu – Yi term for a crane-like bird.

Hlifu/Hlimbo – Yi terms for the headdress a newlywed girl wears to conceal her identity before being revealed to the husband.


Huohuasan (活花伞) – Chinese term for the yellow parasol affiliated with Huobajie.

Huozang (火葬) – Chinese term for cremation.

Hxoyi Ddiggur – Yi epic depicting heroic protagonists.

Ji A Ji (祭阿祭) – Yi ritual performed by the children each of the three nights of Huobajie.

Juhlur – Yi term for an end-blown flute.
Khamba – A branch of the Tibetan ethnic minority group, mostly found in Eastern regions of the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces.

Kouxian (口弦)/Hxohxo – Chinese and Yi term for mouth harp.

Mala (麻辣) – A numbing spice commonly found in Chinese cuisine.

Mabur – Yi term for a bamboo reed aerophone that incorporates the circular breathing technique.

Mbira – A plucked metallophone performed by Shona musicians.

Mgajie – Yi term for the second to lowest class in the former Yi caste system.

Mosheng (陌生) – Chinese term meaning “stranger.”

Ndeggu – Jury members of the Yi community; wise mediators whose impartial judgment helped solve disputes.

Nuoho – Yi term for the second highest class in the former Yi caste system.

Nyop Nyop Hxo – Yi term for an ancient form of folk singing.

Nzymo – Yi term for the highest-class ion the former Yi caste system.

Qiang – The group of people who migrated to southern regions of China, of which the Yi are descendants.

Quho - Yi term referring to White Yi, the middle class of the former Yi caste system.

Raego – A music form in Central Sulawesi that was condemned by colonial forces.

Sanza – Ghanaian plucked metallophone.

Shaka – Yi term for metal foundation on the fire hearth.

Shynra – Yi term for the most “standard” dialect in the Yi language.

Sixian (四弦)/Pambie – Chinese and Yi term for a four-stringed plucked lute.

Suuy and Suga – Wealthy elite in a Yi community who commonly host foreign guests.

Tusi – A leader in a Yi community, usually ethnically Han, that acts as a bridge between the Yi village and the government officials in neighboring regions.
Uofa – Yi term for a traditional woman’s hat.


Wuxing (五行) – A Chinese term commonly affiliated with Daosim, referring to the five elements.

Xinghuijie (星回节) – Yi holiday celebrated in winter, which some scholars confuse with being associated with Huobajie.

Yeho no – Yi ritual to restore or welcome a wandering soul, performed in order to avoid their feelings of sadness or loneliness.

Yezi (叶子)/Syrqi hmo – Chinese and Yi term for leaf.

Zzybi – Yi term meaning “uncategorized people,” or those “practicing an inappropriate craft,” referring to a Bimo that does not go through the proper apprenticeship stages but still conducts rituals.
Appendix

All transcriptions were done by the author, and were recorded between the dates August 8-12, 2012.
Pasture of Flourishing Flowers

Whipping:

\[ \text{Synthesizer} \]

\[ \text{Synth} \]

\[ \text{Synth} \]

\[ \text{Synth} \]

\[ \text{Synth} \]
Moving sun:
July Huobajie

Flames:  \( j = 164 \)

Synthesizer:

Drum Set:

Synth:

Dr.:

9

transcribed by: Jonathan Richter
Dr. Fire spread:

Synth.

Dr.

Synth.

Dr.

Synth.

Dr.
Lifting arms:
Flames spreading:
Hello

Traditional Yi Folksong
transcribed by: Jonathan Richter

Hello

Traditional Yi Folksong
transcribed by: Jonathan Richter
Come Here and Dance!

Traditional Yi Folksong
transcribed by: Jonathan Richter

Ip ne wox kax ge ggep la tit ggep la ax li wei
Ip ne wox kax ge qie la tit qie

Ip ne wox kax ge ggep la tit ggep la ax li wei
Ip ne wox kax ge qie la tit qie

la ax li wei
A li ggep la biex sa ip mi tit go jox a li wei
A ip ne wo kax ge qie la tit qie la a li wei
tit ggep la tit qie la tit ggep la tit qie la!
A.5

Fragrant Flower Romance Song

Traditional Yi Folksong
transcribed by: Jonathan Richter

\( \text{\dot{\text{\textbackslash j}}} = 100 \)

花一香那过了上去你走出理移一層Ax mo 娃 撒的 地一处在

阿妈的女儿一yo！Ap syp jjol 来 map jio it jio?!_ Ap syp jjol 来 map jio it jio?!  

Ax mo gat_dde sho lox ve Nge liet Ax da nge i go_ Ax da lat yy fa lox ve

Ap syp jio! 来 map jio it jio?!_ Ap syp jio! 来 map jio it jio?!

163
Child Jyr Jyr

Traditional Yi Folksong
transcribed by: Jonathan Richter

A.6

\[ J = 120 \]

Ax Yi Ax Yi Jyr... a ddit ba su yo ba hmat pat zyr jot dدور hxi su yo ba hmat pat zyr

jot dدور hxi, yo... a ddit bu hxit ni__ yo nze cyx nze nga gгat bbo shyp njuo ni yo

nze cyx nze Hei... Heи la la la__ la la la__ la Ax yi Ax yи Jyr...

a ddit ba su yo ba hmat pat zyr jot dدور hxi su__ yo ba hmat pat zyr jot dدور hxi su...

a ddit bu hxit ni__ yo nze cyx nze Nga gгat bbo shyp njuo ni_ yo nze cyx nze!
Remembering Friend Song

Traditional Yi Folksong
transcribed by: Jonathan Richter

\( J = 120 \)

[Music notation]

Qo liep jjy qo qi go Jjy qo ap hxit te kop xi Qo liep jjy qo___

qi go hxie mat mg u dde jji ap_hxie Jjie liep jjy jjie bbo ap qi

Ap jjie ap hxit te kop xi Nga nit ngop jiip ge ge sho Nga liep jjo ssy

ne shut die O A O nyuo bby hxa sy xyx mu xyx

O xy vo gg a mop chop lox vop Bbo gat Lox gat

Bbo sse gu ma gat bbo vop Jiip gga vat gga Jyr mo vop mu gat bbo vop

O A O qo bop iex ssa iex ssa bbo

O nyuo bby tat bbit mu tat bbit O A

O qo liep gga ssip jjie bbo vop A zyt liep vat ssip jjie bbo vop
Welcome Song

transcribed by: Jonathan Richter

Synth Strings

\[ \text{\( J = 100 \)} \]
University of Hawai'i

Consent to Participate in Research Project:
Musical Change in Huobajie: The Recontextualization of Nuosu Yi Identity

My name is Jonathan Richter, I am a MA student at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UH), in the Department of Ethnomusicology. I am conducting research for master's degree thesis. The purpose of my current research project is to evaluate various degrees of musical change happening in the Huobajie festival. I am asking you to participate in this research as you are involved in Huobajie activities. I will go through this consent handout with you to ensure that you fully understand the project details and your level of involvement.

Project Description - Activities and Time Commitment: All participants in this project are recruited without bias, and on the basis that they are residents of Laoyaoshan. If you participate, I will interview you once or twice in person, for no more than ten minutes. I will record the interview using a digital audio-recorder. I am recording the interview so I can later type a transcript – a written record of what we talked about during the interview – and analyze the information from the interview. I will also offer an anonymous written questionnaire for you to fill out if you choose to do so. If you participate, you will be one out of approximately 50 people individually interviewed. One example of the type of question I will ask is "What song must be included in a Huobajie performance?" If you would like to preview a copy of all of the questions that I will ask you, please let me know now.

Benefits and Risks: I believe there are no direct benefits to you in participating in my research project. However, the results of this project might help me and other researchers learn more about Huobajie and the process of musical change in general. If, however, you are uncomfortable or stressed by answering any of the interview questions, we will skip the question, or take a break, or stop the interview, or withdraw from the project altogether.

Confidentiality and Privacy: During this research project, I will keep all data from the interviews in a secure location. Only I will have access to the data, although legally authorized agencies, including the University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program, have the right to review research records. After I transcribe the interviews, I will erase the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project, and in my typed transcripts, I will not use your name or any other personally identifying information. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your name. If you would like a summary of the findings from my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.
Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research project is voluntary. You can choose freely to participate or not to participate. In addition, at any point during this project, you can withdraw your permission without any penalty of loss of benefits.

Questions: If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at via phone (404)3123224 or e-mail (jkrich@hawaii.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this project, you can contact the University of Hawai’i, Human Studies Program, by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at uhirb@hawaii.edu.

夏威夷大学

研究参加者的同意合同

火把节的音乐改变：诺苏彝族认同的前后关系

我叫Jonathan Richter，我是一夏威夷大学硕士学生，我学习中国民族音乐学。现在我在一边研究一边写我的毕业论文。我论文的目标是我要评估最近彝族人的火把节音乐改变。因为你参加火把节的活动，所以我想问你如果你愿意不愿意参加我的研究。确保你完全了解你的参与程度，我要跟你复习这个合同了。

课题的解释：活动和时间承诺：每一个参加者是公正招募的，就是你住在老药山的依据。要是你参加，我跟你亲自会有一两个采访，不会超过十分钟。我会用一个录音机记录我们的采访。从这个录音我会写一个记载，然后我可以调查我们的讨论。要是你愿意，我还你一个问卷你可以填写。一共我想采访大约五十个人，如果你参加的话，这个数字也包括了你。这是一个问题的例子：

“火把节的表演必须包括什么歌曲？”要是你要看我问卷全部的问题，我现在可以让你看。

好处和危险：我感觉你的参与没有直接的危险。可是我研究的结果可能会帮助我或者别的研究生了解火把节和音乐的改变。但是，如果你们感觉很不舒服或者压抑，我们可以略过一个问题，休息，停止采访，还是完全停止这个课题。

资料机密性和隐私权：我在研究这个题目的时候，我会保护每个采访和录音的咨询。除了我和法律授权的机关，比如夏威夷大学的人类研究计划以外，没有其他的人会复习这个研究的记载。

我抄写我们的采访以后，我会删除那些录音的。对我最活的文章和陈述来说，我不会用你们的名字，还是其他的个人信息。我会用的名字都是假名。如果你们要我看我最后文章的摘要，请给我打电话（合同下面的电话号码）。
自愿的参与：参与这个研究课题是自愿的。你参加的决定绝对是自由的。再说，
如果你对这个课题要退出也可以，没有坏处或者处罚。

问题：如果你有问题，请给我打电话：4043123224 或 13608851346，还是email：
jkrich@hawaii.edu。如果你有研究参与法律权利的问题，请给夏威夷大学的人类
研究计划联系：(808)956-5007 或 email：uhirb@hawaii.edu。