



Dai Folk Music in water festival Festival Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China

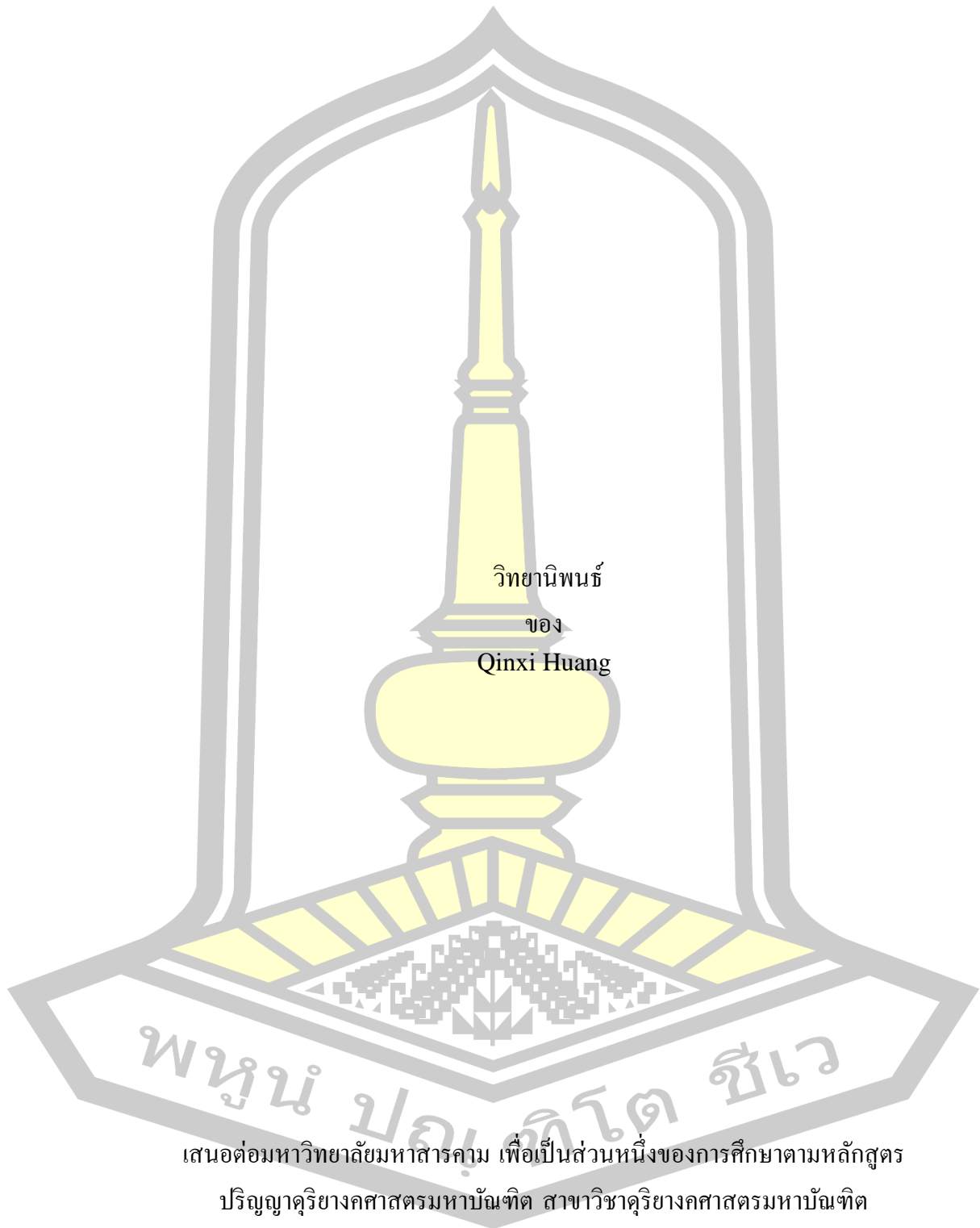
Qinxi Huang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
degree of Master of Music in Music

April 2025

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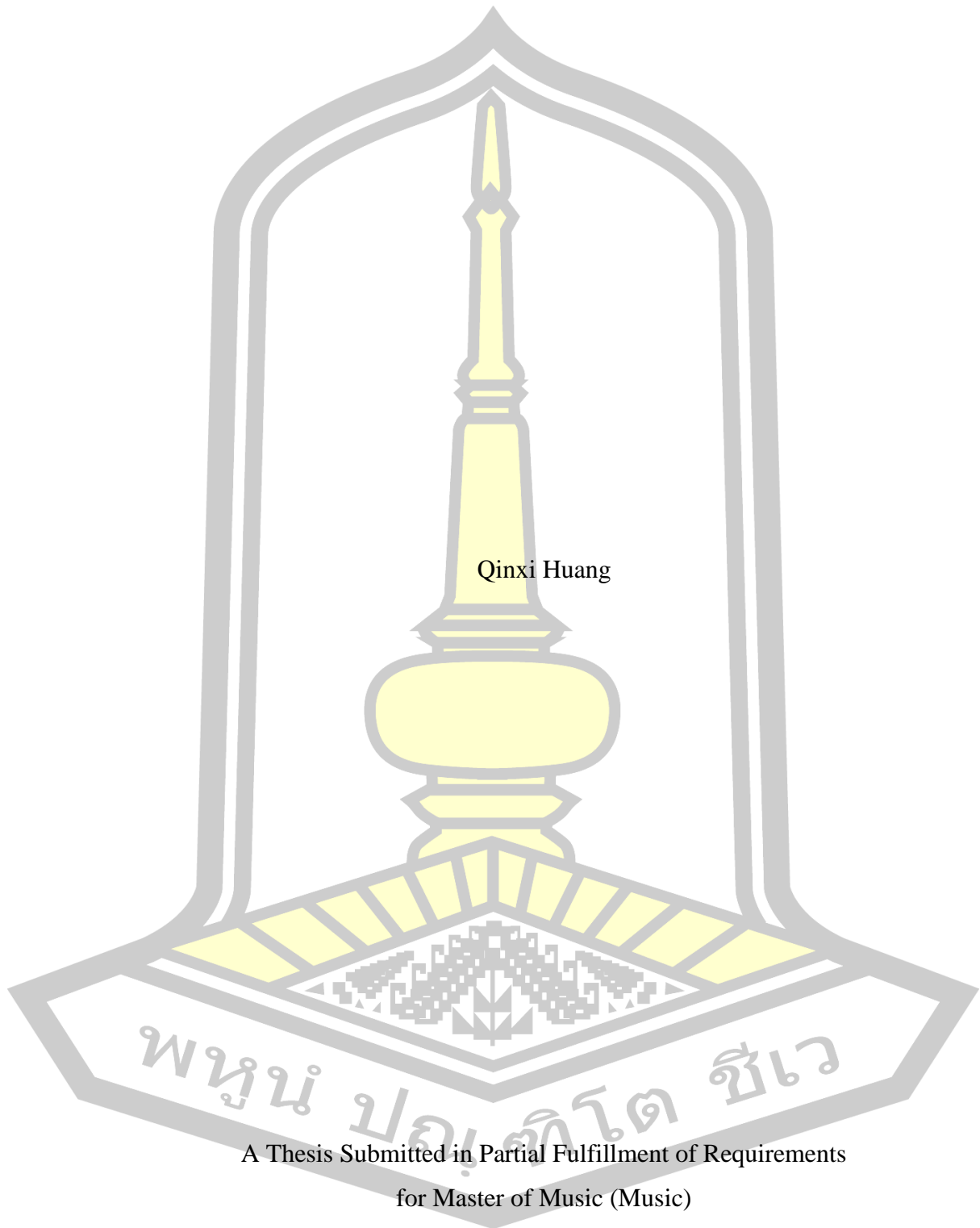
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
for Master of Music (Music)

April 2025

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this Research were as follows: (1) to investigate the historical development of the Water Festival in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China; (2) to analyze the musical characteristics of Dai folk songs performed during the festival. This study employed qualitative research methods, including fieldwork, interviews with Three key informants, and the collection of historical and musical data by used interview form and observations form:

1. The Water Festival, known locally as "Pi Mai" or "Songkran," holds profound cultural and religious significance among the Dai people in Xishuangbanna. The festival, rooted in both animistic traditions and Theravada Buddhism, symbolizes purification, renewal, and communal unity. Over centuries, it has evolved from a localized agrarian ritual into a grand cultural event, blending traditional and modern elements. The festival serves as a key platform for the performance and transmission of Dai folk music.

2. The analysis of Dai folk music in the Water Festival reveals its distinct musical structure, lyrical themes, and instrumental characteristics. The festival songs typically follow a pentatonic scale, with simple yet expressive melodic patterns. The singing style emphasizes natural vocal timbres and emotional expressiveness. Traditional instruments such as the hulusi (gourd flute), elephant foot drum, and Mang Luó (铓锣) are commonly used, alongside modern additions like electronic keyboards and guitars.

Keyword : Dai folk music, Water Festival, Xishuangbanna, Chinese folk songs, Cultural preservation

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Writing this signifies the conclusion of my master's journey. The moment I had long anticipated since entering graduate school has finally arrived. However, as I prepare to leave campus and bid farewell to Thailand, I find myself feeling reluctant rather than joyful.

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To my classmates, thank you for your companionship, encouragement, and kindness; studying in Thailand has been a wonderful experience because of you. A special thank you goes to my family, whose unconditional support has been my greatest source of strength. The thought of reuniting with you soon brings me immense happiness.

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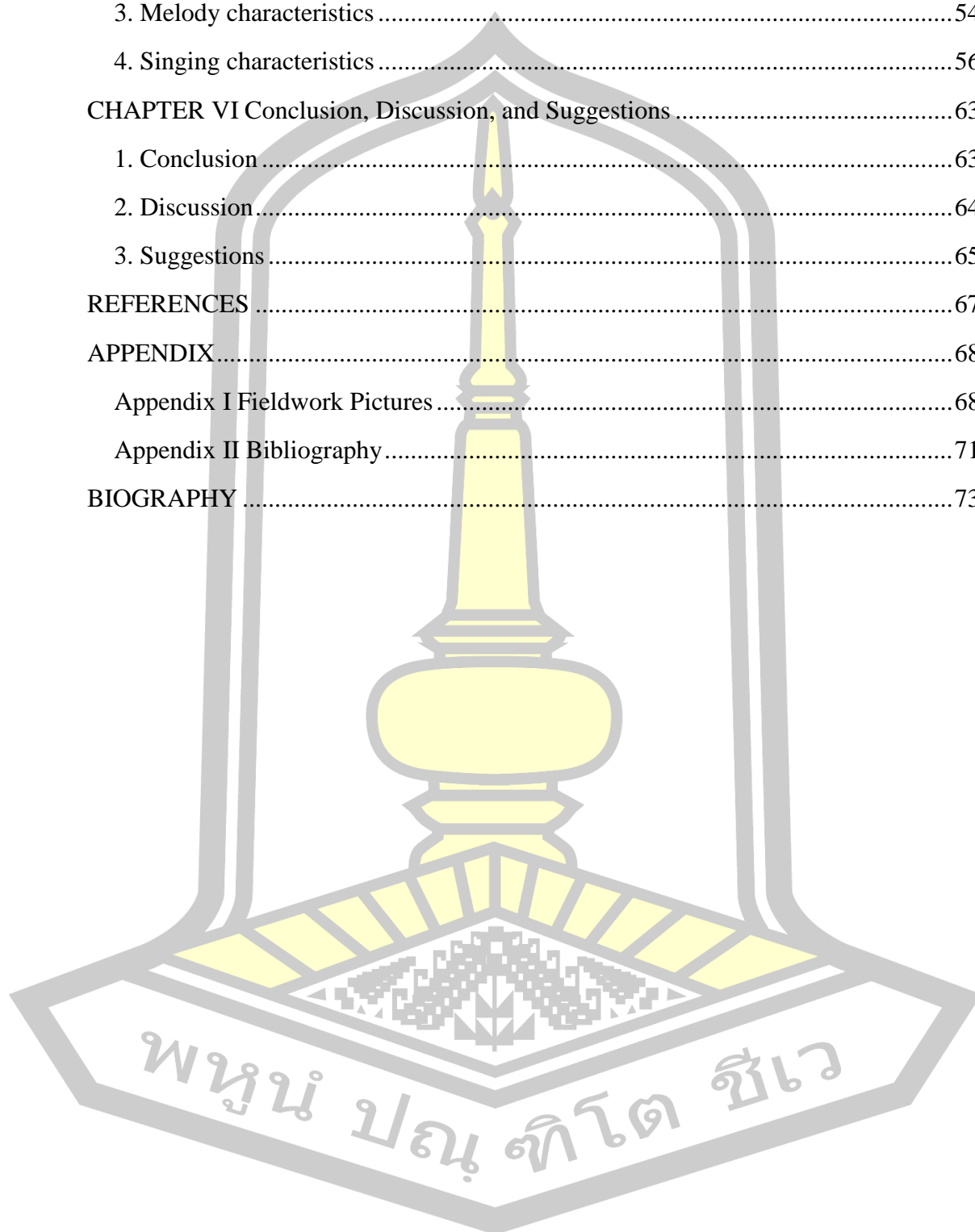
To everyone who has supported me during my master's degree thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Qinxi Huang

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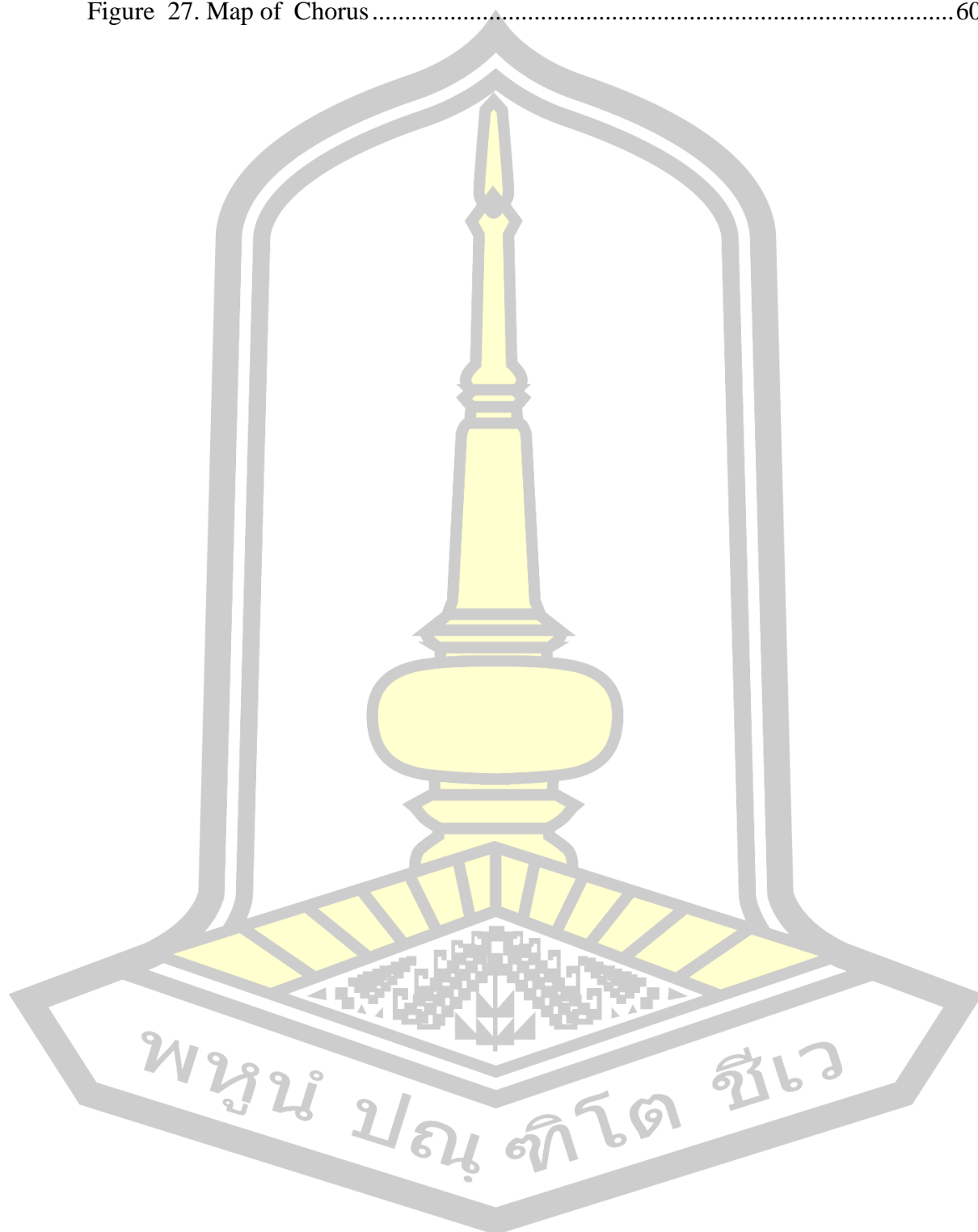


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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Research Background

Xishuangbanna is a unique and culturally rich region located in the southern part of Yunnan Province, China. It is home to a variety of ethnic groups, with the Dai people being the largest and most influential. The Dai culture is deeply rooted in the practices and beliefs of Theravada Buddhism, which plays a central role in their daily lives. Along with Buddhism, folk traditions, rituals, and festivals are important components of Dai culture, with music being an integral part of both religious and social expressions.

Dai folk music reflects the region's deep connection to nature, spirituality, and community life. It is passed down through generations and has evolved to adapt to both traditional and modern influences. One of the most prominent showcases of Dai folk music is the water festival Festival, known locally as the "Water Splashing Festival." This annual event is celebrated with great enthusiasm, not only among the Dai people but also by other ethnic communities in Xishuangbanna. The festival marks the start of the Dai New Year and is dedicated to cleansing and renewal, symbolized through the splashing of water. The Splash Festival, which usually takes place in mid-April, is the most significant cultural and religious festival in Xishuangbanna. It has deep roots in both Buddhist traditions and the Dai people's agricultural lifestyle. Originally tied to Buddhist rituals, it is celebrated to honor Buddha's teachings and pray for prosperity, peace, and good fortune in the coming year. The festival also coincides with the end of the rice harvest, making it a time of joy and celebration for the local people. (Cao Yunhua, 2022)

During the water festival Festival, music plays a central role in the festivities, alongside traditional dances, food offerings, and, most notably, the playful water-splashing activity. It is believed that the water splashing brings blessings and good luck, washing away the past year's misfortunes and welcoming new beginnings. This celebration is both spiritual and communal, where Dai folk music enhances the atmosphere and conveys cultural values, making it essential to understand the musical

dimensions of the event. Music in the Splash Festival is not only a form of entertainment but also an expression of religious devotion, community unity, and cultural identity. The music performed during the festival includes both instrumental and vocal forms, with each type serving distinct purposes. For example, certain melodies and rhythms are used during the religious ceremonies to accompany rituals dedicated to Buddha, while more lively and energetic pieces are performed during the social gatherings and water-splashing activities. Dai folk music at the Splash Festival represents a fusion of the sacred and the secular, where spiritual hymns blend with joyous tunes. Traditional instruments like the hulusi and drums play a crucial role in creating the festival's vibrant soundscape. Music serves as a bridge between the people and their beliefs, reinforcing the connection between the participants and their cultural heritage. This makes the study of Dai folk music in the Splash Festival essential for understanding its role in preserving the cultural and religious traditions of the Dai people. The primary focus of this thesis is to explore the role and significance of Dai folk music in the Splash Festival, with an emphasis on identifying the main types of music performed and understanding their functions within the cultural and religious context of the festival. Given the dynamic nature of the festival, it is important to examine how music is integrated into various aspects of the celebrations—from the religious ceremonies to the communal festivities (Ren Xue, 2013).

Based on the collection of previous data, the researcher found that the historical development of the water festival in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China, has been influenced by various cultural and social factors. This research aims to investigate the historical development of the water festival in Xishuangbanna and analyze the song characteristics of Dai folk music during the festival. The goal of this research is to provide theoretical support and reference for future studies on the cultural preservation and transmission of Dai folk music in the context of the water festival in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China.

2. Research objectives

1. To investigate the historical development the water Festival Song of Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China.

2. To analyze the Song of characteristics Dai water Festival in Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China.

3. Research Questions

1. What is the the historical development the water festival Song of Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China?

2. What are the the Song characteristics of Dai folk song in Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China?

4. Research Benefits

1. We can know the historical development the water festival Song Festival of Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China.

2. We can know the Song characteristics of Dai folk song of Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China.

5. Research Definitions

1. Dai Folk : refers to Dai folk song of the water Festival in Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China,only.

2. Development: Development refers to the evolution of the Water Festival in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province. Originating from agrarian rituals, it was shaped by the tusi system during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), reinforced during the Republican era (1912–1949) as a unifying tradition, and later expanded through tourism. The festival continues to preserve Dai cultural identity while adapting to modern influences.

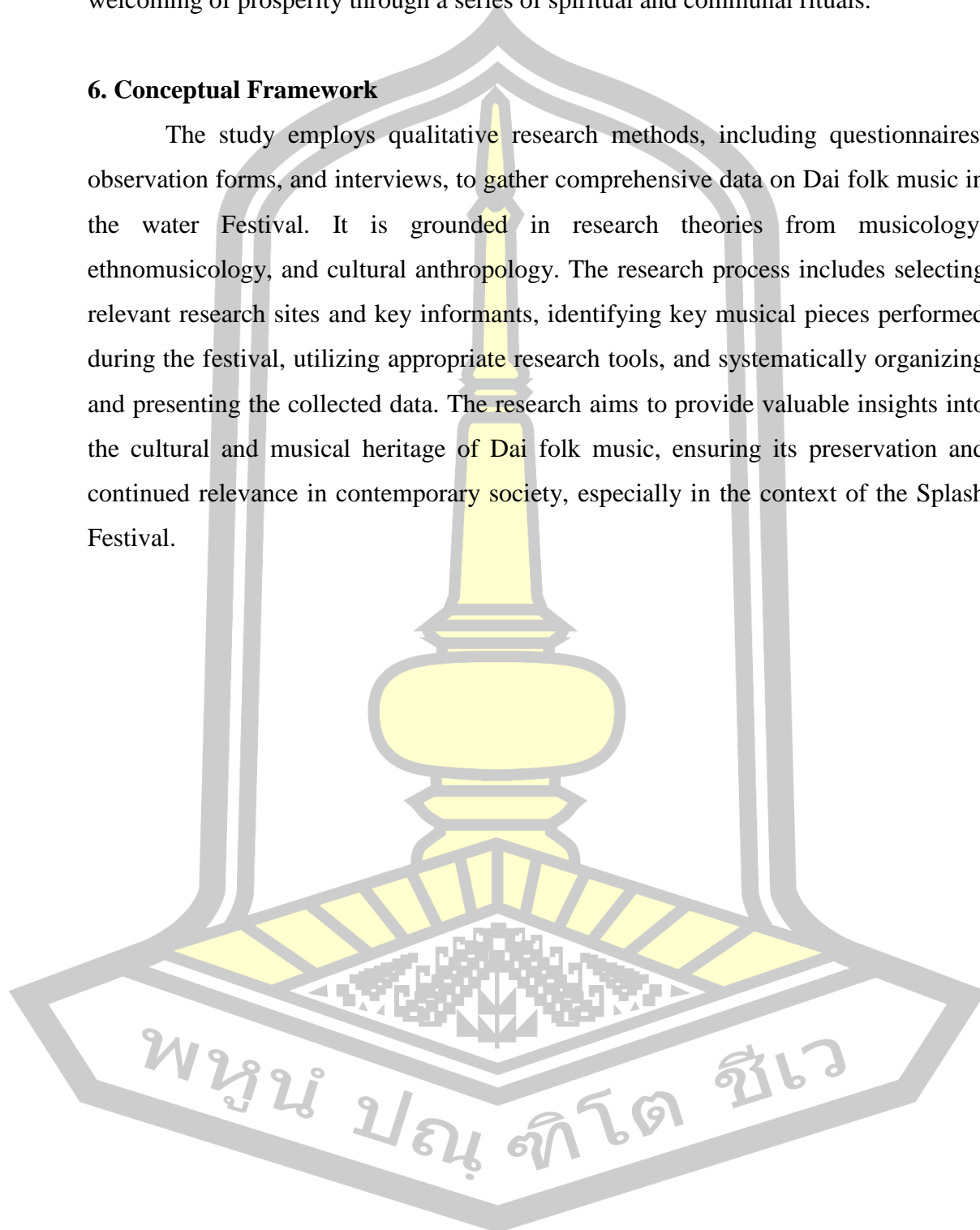
3. Song characteristics:refers to“Singing style”“Musical structure”“Musical instruments used for singing accompaniments”“Melody characteristics”“Singing characteristics”.

4. Water Festival: refers to the traditional New Year celebration of the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China, known locally as “water Festival“ This festival is the most significant cultural and religious event for the Dai

people, celebrated annually in mid-April. It symbolizes purification, renewal, and the welcoming of prosperity through a series of spiritual and communal rituals.

6. Conceptual Framework

The study employs qualitative research methods, including questionnaires, observation forms, and interviews, to gather comprehensive data on Dai folk music in the water Festival. It is grounded in research theories from musicology, ethnomusicology, and cultural anthropology. The research process includes selecting relevant research sites and key informants, identifying key musical pieces performed during the festival, utilizing appropriate research tools, and systematically organizing and presenting the collected data. The research aims to provide valuable insights into the cultural and musical heritage of Dai folk music, ensuring its preservation and continued relevance in contemporary society, especially in the context of the Splash Festival.



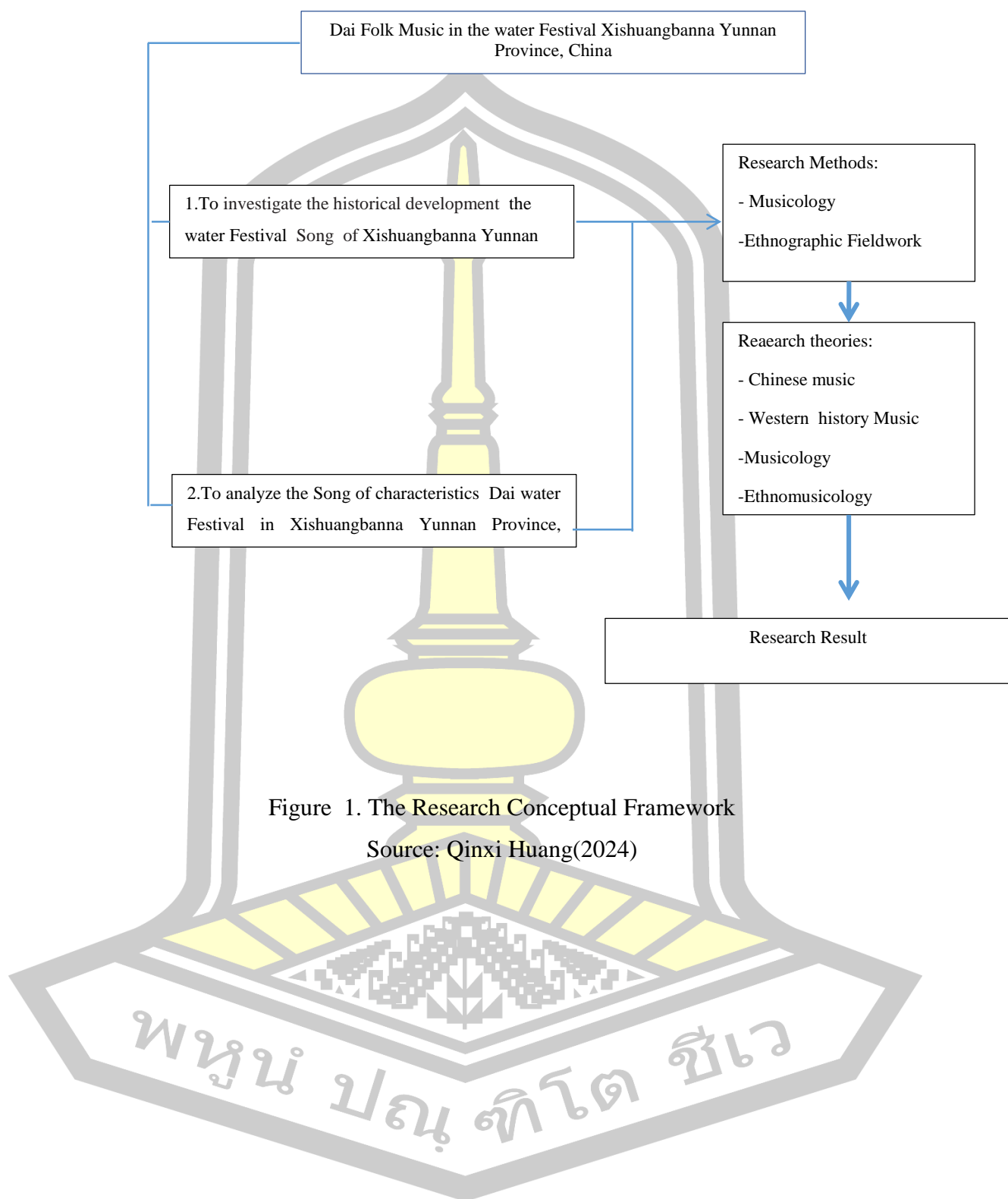


Figure 1. The Research Conceptual Framework

Source: Qinxi Huang(2024)

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

In this chapter, the literature related to Dai folk music in the Splash Festival of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China, is reviewed to gather comprehensive data for this study. The review is conducted in alignment with the research objectives, which are to examine the role of Dai folk music in the Splash Festival and to analyze the main types of Dai folk music performed during the festival. This literature review covers the historical, cultural, and musical aspects of Dai folk music, the cultural significance of the Splash Festival, as well as the theoretical frameworks and methodologies relevant to the study.

1. The General Introduction of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China
2. Theories used Research
3. Document and .Research Related

1. The General Introduction of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China

1.1 Xishuangbanna Geography

Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture is one of the eight autonomous prefectures in Yunnan Province, with its capital located in Jinghong City. Xishuangbanna is situated between latitudes 21°10'—22°40' north and longitudes 99°55'—101°50' east, on the northern edge of the tropical region, south of the Tropic of Cancer, covering an area of 19,124.5 square kilometers. It borders Pu'er City to the northeast and northwest, Laos to the southeast, and Myanmar to the southwest, with a border length of 966.3 kilometers. It shares a river with six countries and has four national-level border ports (Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture People's Government, 2022).

Xishuangbanna is located on the northern edge of the tropical zone and has a tropical monsoon climate. It administers one county-level city and two counties. In 2021, the minority population of Xishuangbanna reached 790,300 people, with the Dai being the main ethnic group, and 13 ethnic groups living in the region. As of the end of 2023, the permanent population of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture

was 1.333 million. Xishuangbanna is renowned for having the most well-preserved tropical ecosystem in China, earning it titles such as the "Kingdom of Plants," "Kingdom of Animals," "Gene Pool of Life," and "A Green Jewel in the Crown of the Plant Kingdom." It is the only tropical rainforest nature reserve in China and a national-level ecological demonstration zone, a national scenic spot, a member of the UN Biodiversity Conservation Circle, and an observation point for the UN World Tourism Organization's sustainable tourism development. The area is home to one-sixth of China's plant species and one-fourth of the country's animal species. Xishuangbanna is also China's second-largest producer of natural rubber, the original habitat of large-leaf tea, and the birthplace of Pu'er tea. It boasts one 5A-level scenic spot and nine 4A-level scenic spots. Famous for its tropical rainforest landscapes and minority ethnic customs, Xishuangbanna is one of China's top tourist destinations. It has been recognized as one of China's most internationally influential tourist destinations and one of the twelve hottest tourist destinations in the world (Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture People's Government, 2022)

1.2 Historical Background

Before 1886, the region was called Chiang Hung, a Tai Lue Kingdom contended between China, Lanna and the Burmese dynasties. Following the Mongol conquest in 1296, subsequent Ming and Qing emperors appointed the Tai Lue rulers of Chiang Hung as a native Tusi governor. In 1563, King Bayinnaung of Burma's Taungoo Dynasty captured Chiang Hung. The Burmese and the Chinese agreed on the joint domination over Xishuangbanna, whose ruler was enthroned in a ceremony in which both Burmese and Chinese representatives jointly presided (Giersch, Charles Patterson, 2006)

In the 19th century, it briefly became a tributary state of Luang Prabang and the Rattanakosin Kingdom during the Burmese–Siamese War (1849–1855). [10] When the British Empire occupied Upper Burma in 1886, it became a part of British India. In 1892, the British transferred Chiang Hung to the Qing Dynasty. In the chaos of the Xinhai Revolution that overthrew the Qing government in 1911 in favor of a Chinese republican government, a local leader, the Chao Maha of Meng Jie, staged a rebellion against Qing remnant officials. The Yunnan provincial government of the newly established Republic of China sent troops in 1913 to oust the Chao Meng Jie

rebels. Ke Shuxun remained in Xishuangbanna to govern with his "13 Principles of Governing the Frontier", which emphasized equality between Han and Dai in areas such as land ownership and taxation, allowed intermarriage between the ethnic groups and promoted education in secular and technical subjects, rather than Burmese-based monastic education. The Second Sino-Japanese War (1931-1945) saw the heavy bombardment of Xishuangbanna by Japanese troops and a simultaneous influx of Pan-Taiist propaganda from Japan's ally, Thailand. According to Hsieh,[13] this reduced the appeal of a broad pan-Tai identity among the Dai Lue (Hsieh, 1989).

During the final phase of the Chinese Civil War, many remnants of the Kuomintang fled from Communist forces into Burma's Shan State from Xishuangbanna. The new People's Republic of China sent various non-military expeditions to Xishuangbanna from 1949 to provide services such as schools and hospitals to replace those from Christian western missionaries. The Communists took control of the prefecture from Kuomintang loyalists in 1952. On January 23, 1953, the PRC established the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Region and ended the native-chieftain system. That year, the People's Congress of Xishuangbanna created the New Tai Lue alphabet, based on the Tai Tham alphabet, for printing material in the Tai Lü language.

Xishuangbanna was made an autonomous prefecture in 1955 but lost some territory on the creation of Jingdong Yi Autonomous County and Jiangcheng Hani and Yi Autonomous County.[16] Land reform started in earnest in January 1956, destroying the power of the village headmen. State-owned rubber plantations accounted for most of the region's wealth during the early PRC period ("Corruption threatens China rainforest", 2018)

Xishuangbanna also received an influx of educated youth during the Down to the Countryside Movement of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During this period Buddhist temples in Xishuangbanna were used as barns, only being restored to their original purpose in 1981. In 1987, the Xishuangbanna government promulgated the Law of the Xishuangbanna Dai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture for Self-government to bring local laws into line with the national Law of the People's Republic of China for Regional National Autonomy.

1.3 The Role of Festivals in Xishuangbanna

Festivals are an integral part of the cultural and religious life of the people of Xishuangbanna, particularly the Dai. Among the many festivals celebrated in the region, the Splash Festival (known as "Songkran" in Thailand or "Pi Mai" in Laos) is the most significant. It marks the beginning of the Dai New Year and is celebrated with much fanfare, including water-splashing activities, religious ceremonies, and performances of traditional music and dance. The festival is celebrated not only by the Dai people but also by other ethnic groups in the region, reflecting the shared cultural heritage of the people of Xishuangbanna. The Splash Festival is a time for purification and renewal, both spiritually and physically. The act of splashing water symbolizes washing away the old and welcoming the new. During the festival, people visit temples to make offerings and pray for good fortune in the coming year. Music plays a central role in these religious and social activities, providing a backdrop for both solemn rituals and joyful celebrations.

In addition to the Splash Festival, other important festivals in Xishuangbanna include the Flower Festival and the Temple Fair, both of which involve music and dance as key components. These festivals provide opportunities for the performance of traditional Dai music, helping to preserve and transmit this cultural heritage to future generations. The continued performance of Dai folk music in these festivals reflects the resilience of Dai culture in the face of modernization and globalization (China National Literature Network, 2022)

1.4 The Musical Traditions of Xishuangbanna

Music in Xishuangbanna, particularly among the Dai people, is characterized by its integration with religious and social life. Dai folk music is performed at festivals, religious ceremonies, weddings, and other important community events. The music is often accompanied by traditional instruments such as the hulusi (a gourd flute), drums, cymbals, and gongs. Vocal music is also an important part of Dai musical traditions, with songs often reflecting themes of love, nature, and religious devotion. The hulusi, in particular, is a symbol of Dai musical culture. This instrument, made from a gourd and bamboo pipes, produces a hauntingly beautiful sound that is central to many Dai musical performances. It is often played during festivals, including the Splash Festival, and is used to accompany both religious

ceremonies and social dances. The drum is another important instrument in Dai folk music, providing the rhythmic foundation for many performances. In the Splash Festival, drumming is used to energize the crowd and enhance the celebratory atmosphere.

Dai folk music is not only a form of entertainment but also a way of reinforcing cultural identity and transmitting values from one generation to the next. The performance of traditional music during festivals like the Splash Festival serves as a reminder of the deep connection between the Dai people and their cultural heritage. Music in Xishuangbanna is a living tradition, constantly evolving while remaining rooted in the ancient practices of the Dai people. In recent years, the cultural landscape of Xishuangbanna has been impacted by modernization, tourism, and globalization. The rapid development of the region's tourism industry has brought increased visibility to Dai culture, but it has also introduced challenges related to the commercialization and commodification of traditional practices. Festivals like the Splash Festival have become major tourist attractions, and there is concern that the influx of tourists may lead to the dilution or distortion of traditional practices, including music.

However, there are also efforts to preserve and promote the traditional music of the Dai people. Local government initiatives, cultural institutions, and community organizations have been working to ensure that the performance of Dai folk music remains authentic and true to its cultural roots. Schools and cultural centers in Xishuangbanna offer programs that teach traditional music to younger generations, helping to ensure that the musical traditions of the Dai people continue to thrive in the modern world (China National Literature Network, 2022).

In conclusion, Xishuangbanna is a region of immense cultural and ecological significance, with a rich history and vibrant traditions. The Dai people, through their festivals and music, maintain a deep connection to their cultural heritage, even as they navigate the challenges of modernization and globalization. The Splash Festival, in particular, serves as a powerful expression of Dai identity, with music playing a central role in the festival's religious and social functions. Understanding the cultural and musical landscape of Xishuangbanna is essential for appreciating the significance

of Dai folk music in the Splash Festival and for contributing to its preservation and continued relevance in contemporary society.

2. Theories Used in Research

2.1 Musicology

Musicology is the general term for all theoretical subjects that study music. The general task of musicology is to elucidate the nature and laws of various phenomena related to music. For example, studies on the relationship between music and ideology include music aesthetics, music history, music ethnology, music psychology, music pedagogy, etc. The study of the material and material characteristics of music includes musical acoustics, jurisprudence, instrumental science, etc. The study of music form and its composition includes melodic theory, harmony acoustics, counterpoint, composition theory, etc. There are also from the performance aspect to consider, such as performance theory, command method and so on (Zhao Yawei, 2019; Zhao Zhongming, 2009).

In this study, the researchers employed musicological methods to analyze the playing techniques and musical compositions of the Tianqin, categorizing the analysis into three levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced. The musicological approach in this thesis begins by examining the human spirit and social environment, interpreting musical phenomena within the broader context of society, history, and cultural life beyond the music itself. Additionally, the social nature of music is explored through the musical structures and formal elements, providing a deeper understanding of its cultural significance.

2.2 Ethnomusicology

2.2.1 Definition of Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology is the study of music in relation to the cultural and social contexts of the people who create it, as well as how it influences listener behavior. This field incorporates a variety of theoretical and Jaaphodological approaches, focusing on the cultural, social, material, cognitive, biological, and other dimensions of musical behavior, beyond just the sound itself. In musical ethnography, it involves direct, personal engagement with musical practices, often referred to as "musicking," which means participating in musical performances. Folklorists who began

documenting and studying folk music in Europe and the US during the 19th century are regarded as the precursors of this field before World War II. The term "ethnomusicology" was reportedly coined by Jaap Kunst, derived from Greek, and is often described as the anthropology or ethnography of music, or simply as musical anthropology (Rice, 2013).

2.2.2 Theories and Methods of Ethnomusicology

Anthropological and Musicological Approaches:

There are two common approaches to ethnomusicological studies: the anthropological and the musicological. Ethnomusicologists who take the anthropological approach focus on studying music to gain insights into people and their cultures. In contrast, those using the musicological approach examine people and cultures to better understand music. Charles Seeger distinguished these two perspectives, describing the anthropology of music as exploring how music functions within culture and social life, while musical anthropology investigates social life through the lens of performance, emphasizing how music plays a role in shaping and interpreting social and conceptual relationships and processes.

Ethnomusicologists who adopt the anthropological approach include notable scholars like Steven Feld and Alan Merriam. These scholars emphasize the significance of fieldwork and the use of participant observation. This approach can encompass various fieldwork practices, such as gaining firsthand experience with a musical tradition or technique, participating in a native ensemble, or immersing oneself in social customs. Alan Merriam, in particular, defined ethnomusicology as the study of "music as culture." He outlined four key goals for the field: to preserve and explain non-Western music, to document folk music before it vanishes in the modern world, to study music as a form of communication that fosters global understanding, and to offer a platform for broader exploration and reflection for those with an interest in indigenous studies.

2.2.3 The application of Ethnomusicological methods in this study

The research method of ethnomusicology is widely used in this study. It provides important data and plays an important role in field work, interviewing key informants, sorting, and collecting data, and analyzing data. Based on obtaining data and materials, the researcher uses the principles of ethnomusicology to analyze

and explore the historical, social, and cultural backgrounds related to Tianqin, so as to further study their functions, roles, development and preservation status and trends. These contents are covered in the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters of this thesis.

2.3 Western Music Theory:

Music analysis serves as a critical tool for unraveling the intricate layers of musical compositions. By dissecting elements like form, melody, and harmony, music analysis unveils the underlying emotional and thematic dimensions that shape a composition. This approach is particularly relevant in Chinese music, where traditional elements like melodic structure and tonality play a defining role. Moreover, music analysis extends beyond the technical realm, delving into the spiritual and historical connotations that imbue music with profound meaning. The integration of music analysis with historical and social perspectives enriches our comprehension of music's role as both an artistic expression and a cultural artifact

2.4 Chinese Music Theory:

"Elements of Traditional Chinese Melody" tells about the scale, mode, rhythm, beat, speed in traditional Chinese melody, as well as the overall melody expression technique and melody organization and development method with Chinese characteristics. This research mainly explores how the traditional Chinese scales and modes used in music can be used to understand By music analysis.

Together, these theoretical frameworks deepen our appreciation and understanding of the meaning of music in human culture. From the academic depth of musicology to the cultural exploration of ethnomusicology, to the technical analysis of the essential components of traditional Dai folk music, the synthesis of these theories not only enriches our understanding of the role of music in shaping human musical aesthetics, but also the artistic expression of Dai national culture and the role of music in reinforcing cultural identity and social context. It also provides profound insights into the multifaceted nature of Dai folk music during the Water Festival.

This comprehensive approach reveals the role of music as an important channel of cultural exchange throughout history and across regions. It highlights the unique role of Dai folk music in expressing the emotions, thoughts, and shared cultural experiences of the Dai people during the Water Festival, contributing to a

deeper understanding of how music serves as a reflection of human emotions and cultural identity.

In summary, this research uses musicology to explore the relationship between Dai folk music and its cultural context, particularly within the Water Festival in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province. Ethnomusicology will examine the role of music in the Dai people's cultural practices, providing insights into its significance and resonance within the community. Western Music Theory will analyze the structural components of Dai folk music, uncovering its emotional and thematic dimensions. Chinese Music Theory will focus on the traditional elements of Dai melodies, offering a comprehensive view of the technical and expressive aspects that define Dai folk music. This approach will deepen the understanding of the music's artistic and cultural significance within the context of the Water Festival.

3. Research Related

The study of Dai folk music, particularly in the context of the Splash Festival, has not been extensively covered in existing literature. While research on ethnic music in China and the cultural practices of the Dai people has grown over the years, focused studies on the role of music within this specific festival remain limited. This section reviews the key related research that touches on the broader themes of Dai folk music, festival culture, and the intersection of music and ritual in Xishuangbanna, but also highlights the gaps that this study seeks to address.

3.1 Research on Dai Folk Music

Previous research on Dai folk music has generally focused on its role in the daily lives of the Dai people, its instruments, and the musical forms that have been passed down through generations. Scholars such as Chen (2010) and Wang (2015) have provided valuable insights into the history and characteristics of Dai folk music, emphasizing the importance of instruments like the *hulusi* and the cymbals in both religious and secular contexts. Their studies highlight how music is intertwined with the Dai people's spiritual beliefs and how it serves as a medium for cultural expression.

However, most of these studies approach Dai music from a general ethnomusicological perspective, focusing on its technical and instrumental aspects

without delving deeply into how it functions within specific cultural events, such as the Splash Festival. This gap underscores the need for a more detailed examination of how different types of Dai folk music are utilized during this important festival and how the festival context shapes musical performance and meaning.

3.2 Studies on the Splash Festival

The Splash Festival has been the subject of various cultural and anthropological studies, with many scholars investigating its religious significance, its connection to Theravada Buddhism, and its role in reinforcing Dai identity. For instance, Li (2012) and Zhang (2016) have explored the social and religious dimensions of the festival, discussing how the ritual of water-splashing symbolizes purification and renewal. They also examine the festival's importance as a public celebration of Dai culture and as a space for community bonding.

Despite the depth of research on the Splash Festival's cultural and social aspects, there is a noticeable lack of focus on the specific role that music plays during the celebrations. The few studies that do mention music tend to view it as a secondary feature, rather than as a primary element integral to the festival's religious and social practices. This creates a research opportunity to investigate the types of music performed and their specific functions within the festival, which aligns with this thesis's research objectives and questions.

3.3 Music in Festival and Ritual Contexts

Music in ritual and festival contexts has been widely studied within the field of ethnomusicology. Scholars such as Merriam (1964) and Nettl (1983) have highlighted the integral role that music plays in both religious and secular celebrations across cultures. These studies emphasize how music can serve as a vehicle for both individual expression and collective identity, providing a medium through which communities reinforce their cultural values and social structures.

In the case of Dai folk music during the Splash Festival, this theoretical framework is particularly relevant. Music not only accompanies the festival's rituals, such as temple visits and water-splashing, but also serves as a tool for maintaining Dai cultural heritage in the face of modernization and globalization. The application of such theoretical perspectives helps to frame the importance of Dai folk music as

more than just entertainment, highlighting its role in cultural preservation and transmission during the Splash Festival.

3.4 Music, Ethnicity, and Identity in Xishuangbanna

Research on the intersection of music, ethnicity, and identity in Xishuangbanna has primarily focused on how ethnic groups like the Dai use music to assert their cultural identity. Studies by scholars such as Huang (2017) and Liu (2019) have demonstrated that music plays a central role in ethnic identity formation, particularly in festivals where communities come together to celebrate shared cultural heritage. These studies reveal that festivals serve as key moments for reinforcing ethnic pride and solidarity through the performance of traditional music and dance.

In the Splash Festival, Dai folk music functions as a means of expressing both individual and collective identity. The festival provides a public platform for musicians and performers to showcase their cultural heritage, and the music performed is imbued with symbolic meaning related to the themes of renewal, purification, and community unity. However, these studies stop short of providing a detailed musical analysis of the specific types of songs or instrumental pieces performed during the Splash Festival, leaving a gap that this research aims to fill.

3.5 Tourism and Modern Influences

One important dimension of recent research on the Splash Festival and Dai culture in Xishuangbanna is the impact of tourism and modern influences. As the region has become a popular tourist destination, scholars such as Yang (2020) have studied how the commercialization of the Splash Festival has affected traditional practices, including music. While tourism has helped bring visibility to Dai culture and provided economic benefits, there are concerns that it may lead to the commodification or alteration of traditional music.

These studies highlight the tension between preservation and adaptation in contemporary festival settings. The influx of tourists has led to performances of Dai folk music being adapted to meet audience expectations, sometimes at the expense of authenticity. This study will explore how Dai folk music in the Splash Festival balances tradition and modernity, particularly in the context of preserving cultural authenticity while engaging with a global audience.

Despite the wealth of research on Dai culture, the Splash Festival, and ethnic music in China, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the specific role and types of music performed during the Splash Festival. Few studies have provided a detailed analysis of how different musical forms—such as instrumental pieces, vocal songs, and ceremonial music—are used throughout the various stages of the festival. Additionally, there is little discussion of the cultural significance of these musical performances and how they contribute to the overall atmosphere and meaning of the festival. This thesis seeks to address these gaps by focusing specifically on the role of music in the Splash Festival, with the aim of identifying the main types of Dai folk music performed and analyzing their cultural, social, and religious functions. By doing so, this research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the musical dimension of the Splash Festival and its importance in preserving Dai cultural heritage.

4. Summary

The existing body of literature reveals a growing interest in the music, culture, and festivals of ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province, particularly among the Dai people in Xishuangbanna. Studies on Dai folk music have provided valuable insights into the characteristics, instruments, and cultural significance of this tradition. However, the focus of most research has been on the general aspects of Dai music, such as its role in religious and daily life, without specifically addressing its function during the Splash Festival. Furthermore, while scholars have explored the social, religious, and cultural dimensions of the Splash Festival, the particular role of music within the festival remains largely under-researched.

In conclusion, this literature review has underscored the need for focused research on the role of music in the water Festival and the specific types of music performed. This study seeks to contribute to the field by filling these gaps, providing a deeper understanding of how Dai folk music functions in this culturally significant festival. The findings will enhance efforts to preserve Dai musical traditions in the face of modernization and provide a foundation for further research on ethnic music in China's festival contexts.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This research is qualitative. fieldwork survey, collected data and sought ancestors. Therefore, my methods are as follows.

1. Research scope
 - 1.1 Scope of content
 - 1.2 Scope of time
2. Research process
 - 2.1 Selection of the research sites
 - 2.2 Selection of the key informants
 - 2.3 Selection of the song
 - 2.4 Research tools
 - 2.5 Data collection
 - 2.6 Data management
 - 2.7 Data analysis
 - 2.8 Data presentation

1. Research Scope

1.1 Scope of Content

1.1.1 The current status of Dai folk music in the Water Festival in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, is comprehensively investigated from various perspectives. This survey includes the exploration of the historical development of Dai folk music in the festival, the evaluation of the current status of musicians and performers involved in the festival, the methods of transmitting Dai folk music, and the role of educational institutions or cultural organizations engaged in the preservation of Dai folk music.

1.1.2 The musical characteristics and performance techniques of Dai folk music in the Water Festival. This includes the analysis of the melody, modal structures, rhythmic patterns, instruments used, and vocal techniques unique to the music performed during the festival.

1.1.3 The preservation and transmission of Dai folk music: An exploration into the significance of preserving Dai folk music in the context of the Splash Festival, the challenges and issues faced in its transmission, and an analysis of the practices and efforts made by the local community and institutions to ensure its continued existence and relevance in contemporary society.

1.2 Scope of time

The study was conducted from September 2024 to January 2025. Field research was conducted from September 2024 to January 2025, including interviews, observations, and recordings of key informants. The writing and revision of the thesis were also completed during this period.

2. Research process

2.1 Selection of the Research Sites

This paper takes Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, as the primary research site, with the Dai folk music performed during the Splash Festival as the research object for field investigation. Xishuangbanna is chosen because it is the cultural heartland of the Dai ethnic group, where the Splash Festival is celebrated annually with great significance. The region has preserved, developed, and widely practiced Dai folk music, making it a vital area for studying the musical traditions of the Dai people. Dai folk music is recognized as an important part of the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Dai community, and its unique role in the Splash Festival makes it an ideal subject for this research.

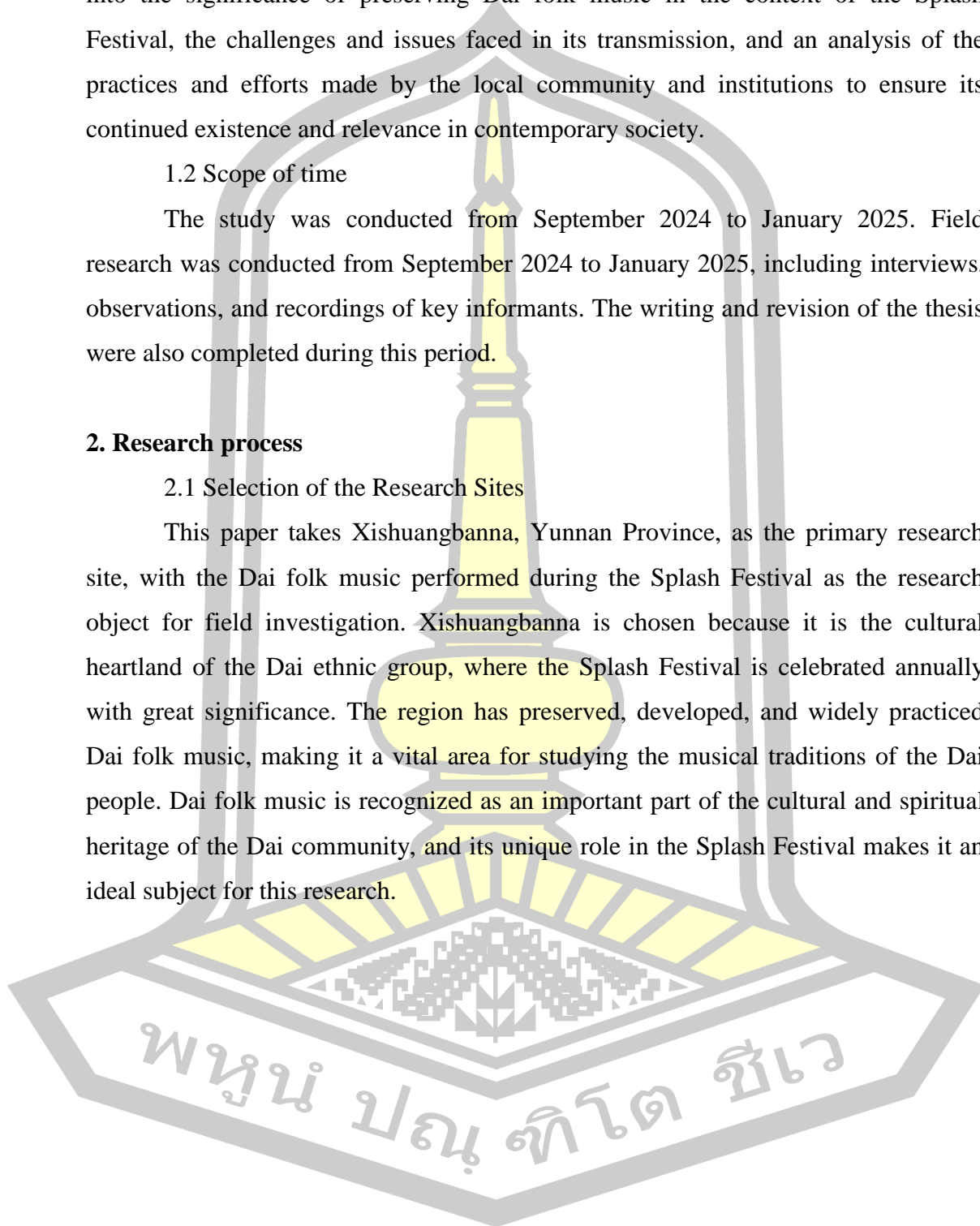




Figure 2. Map of Yunnan Province

Source: <https://chinafolio.com/provinces>

2.2 Selection of the Key Informants

Based on the research objectives, the researcher selected three groups of people as interviewees for the field research: key informants, general informants, and casual informants. The following criteria and selected personnel for key informants will be presented.

2.2.1 Key Informants

The criteria for selecting key informants are:

- 1) Born and raised in the Dai-inhabited area of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, with lifelong immersion in Dai culture, especially the musical practices associated with the Water Festival.
- 2) Recognized as experienced Dai folk song performers, cultural transmitters, or traditional music instructors, with over 20 years of experience in singing, composing, performing, or teaching Dai Water Festival songs.
- 3) Individuals who have actively participated in major Water Festival events, such as temple ceremonies, public performances, or cultural showcases, and who may have received local or national awards for their contributions to the preservation and promotion of Dai musical heritage.

4) Contributors to the documentation and transmission of Dai folk music, including those who have published written works, recordings, or participated in field studies; or individuals officially designated as inheritors of Dai intangible cultural heritage (ICH), especially those specializing in festival-related musical traditions.



Figure 3. Yan Geng

Source: Qinxu Huang, from research fieldwork (2024)

Yan Geng (pen name: Yan Geng), born Yan Han Geng, is a renowned Dai ethnic singer from Lincang, Yunnan Province, China. He was born on September 20, 1972, in Xiacheng, Mengding, Gengma County. Yan Geng, a member of the Dai ethnic group, holds a technical secondary education and is currently serving in the Gengma Song and Dance Troupe. Many of his songs are self-composed and self-performed, characterized by beautiful and melodious tunes. His music often revolves around the daily lives of ordinary people, making it deeply relatable and beloved by the Dai community.



Figure 4. Yan Jiao

Source:Qinxi Huang , from research fieldwork (2024)

Yan Jiao, male, was born in 1979 in Manyunlong Village, Gasa Town, Jinghong City. He started learning Dai Zhangha singing from Kang Langzuo in 1990 and was known as the "Emperor of Dai Songs". In June 2009, he formed a band to perform at the Water Festival. At the same time, Yan Jiao was selected as the third batch of national intangible cultural heritage representative project inheritors of Dai singers.

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Figure 5. Yanhan En,
Source:Qinxi Huang , from research fieldwork (2024)

Yan Han'en is a Dai ethnic singer active in Yunnan Province, China. He is well-known for composing and performing Dai-language songs, which are deeply loved by the Dai people. His music has gained wide popularity on platforms such as Douyin (TikTok China), featuring songs like "Do You Still Think of Me - Dai Version", "Missing My Lover", and "Wrong Love". Additionally, Yan Han'en has contributed to the creation of new Dai songs, such as "This Life's Promise", with lyrics written by Hanluan Mengwa and Yan Han'en, composed by Yan Han'en, and arranged by Yan Wenhan (Xingwan). His music is characterized by beautiful melodies and heartfelt performances, making him a beloved figure among listeners.

2.2.2 General Informants

The criteria for selecting general informants are:

- 1) The person was born and raised in the Dai area of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province.
- 2) The person is knowledgeable about the cultural development and traditions of Dai folk music.

3) The person has many years of experience in performing Dai folk music, particularly in the Water Festival.

4) The person has years of experience teaching or promoting Dai folk music, contributing to its preservation and transmission.

2.2.3 Casual Informants

The criteria for selecting casual informants are:

1) The person was born and raised in the Dai area of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province.

2) The person is knowledgeable about the cultural practices of the Dai people, including the Splash Festival.

3) The person has participated in or observed Dai folk music performances during the Splash Festival, either as a community member or festival attendee.

Audience Representatives Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select individuals who have a deep understanding and experience with Dai folk music, particularly as it is performed in the Splash Festival. These individuals may be audience members, festival participants, or casual observers with significant cultural knowledge of the festival's music and its role in the community.

2.3 Selection of the Song

The criteria for selecting the musical pieces are:

1) The song is suggested by those who have inherited "intangible cultural heritage" in the Dai community, particularly related to the Dai Water Festival.

2) Classic representative works that are traditionally performed during the Dai Water Festival.

3) The song has distinctive regional characteristics specific to Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, reflecting the local cultural and musical traditions of the Dai Water Festival.

4) Recommendations from professional performers or cultural experts familiar with the music of the Dai Water Festival.

5) The song has a significant cultural or historical impact on the Xishuangbanna area or Yunnan Province, especially in terms of its contribution to the cultural identity of the Dai community through the Dai Water Festival.

2.4 Research Tools

Field investigation is an important research method for this study. The main research tools used in this study are the interview and observation methods. Data collection and interviews with experts and her family. To better record useful data and materials, I prepared a video recorder, a tape recorder, a computer, a pen, and a notebook.

The process of creating an interview:

- 1) Design questions based on research objectives
- 2) Design appropriate questionnaire and interview content
- 3) Submit it to the customer for inspection.
- 4) Modify according to the consulting editor.
- 5) Make modifications based on expert advice before working on site.

2.5 Data Collecting

In order to collect information, the researcher conducted fieldwork during the first semester before April 15, 2024 is the Water Splashing Festival in Xishuangbanna to gather relevant data on the Water Festival, completing the data collection for Research Objective 1. After passing the September 2024 defense, the researcher identified key informants and established contact with them for further study. A second round of fieldwork was conducted to analyze songs provided by key informants, completing the data collection for Research Objective 2.

1) During the first semester before September 2024 , the researcher conducted initial fieldwork and gathered general information about the Water Festival through observations, document analysis, and preliminary interviews.

2) After passing the September 2024 defense, the researcher identified key informants and established connections with them for further investigation.

3) During the second round of fieldwork, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews and collected songs provided by the key informants. These songs were analyzed to complete the study on the musical characteristics of the Water Festival, achieving Research Objective 2.

The data collection method is as follows:

1) Interview: In the process of collecting data in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, the researcher selected three groups of informants as interview subjects. The format of the interviews was flexible, and the content aligned with the research objectives.

The selected informants were: Inheritors of Dai folk music traditions, particularly those involved in the Splash Festival. Researchers and performers specializing in Dai folk music, including experts in festival music. Music teachers and students from primary and secondary schools, as well as local universities in Xishuangbanna, who engage in teaching and learning Dai folk music. These interviews were aimed at gathering insights into the cultural and musical significance of Dai folk music in the Splash Festival, including its preservation, transmission, and evolution.

2) Observation: In the process of data collection, the researcher conducted a direct observation survey on Dai folk music during the Splash Festival in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province. Using mobile phones, DSLRs, cameras, and recording devices, the performances and cultural activities related to Dai folk music were recorded. The performance processes of various pieces of Dai folk music were observed and documented with complete video recordings and relevant photos. First-hand data was collected and stored using SD cards, computers, and USB flash drives. The researcher attended Dai folk music performances, music teaching sessions, and key events during the Splash Festival. Participation in local cultural events allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how music functions within the festival and its cultural significance for the Dai people.

3) Questionnaire: The questionnaire was one of the key tools for conducting fieldwork. Dai folk music performed during the Splash Festival consists of various types, each with distinct performance techniques and styles. Based on the social functions of Dai folk music, the performances can be categorized into solo performances, group performances, and ritualistic performances. Several representative pieces from each category were selected. Pre-prepared questionnaires were distributed within Xishuangbanna to identify the most significant pieces that characterize Dai folk music during the Splash Festival. These pieces, deeply appreciated by the Dai people, were chosen for their popularity and cultural relevance. The collected data from the questionnaires were analyzed and compared, summarizing the performance characteristics of Dai folk music during the Splash Festival in terms of musical features and their impact on the community.

4) Document Analysis: Relevant documents were reviewed, including educational curricula, policy documents, historical records, and existing research literature related to Dai folk music and the Splash Festival. This analysis provided a deeper understanding of how Dai folk music has been preserved and transmitted over time, and

how it is integrated into educational and cultural policies in the region. Through these methods, a rich body of data was gathered to support the research objectives and provide a comprehensive view of the role and significance of Dai folk music in the Splash Festival.

2.6 Data Management

Ethical Considerations: Ensure informed consent from all participants, guaranteeing their anonymity and confidentiality. Any observations or interviews will only be conducted with participants' full understanding and consent.

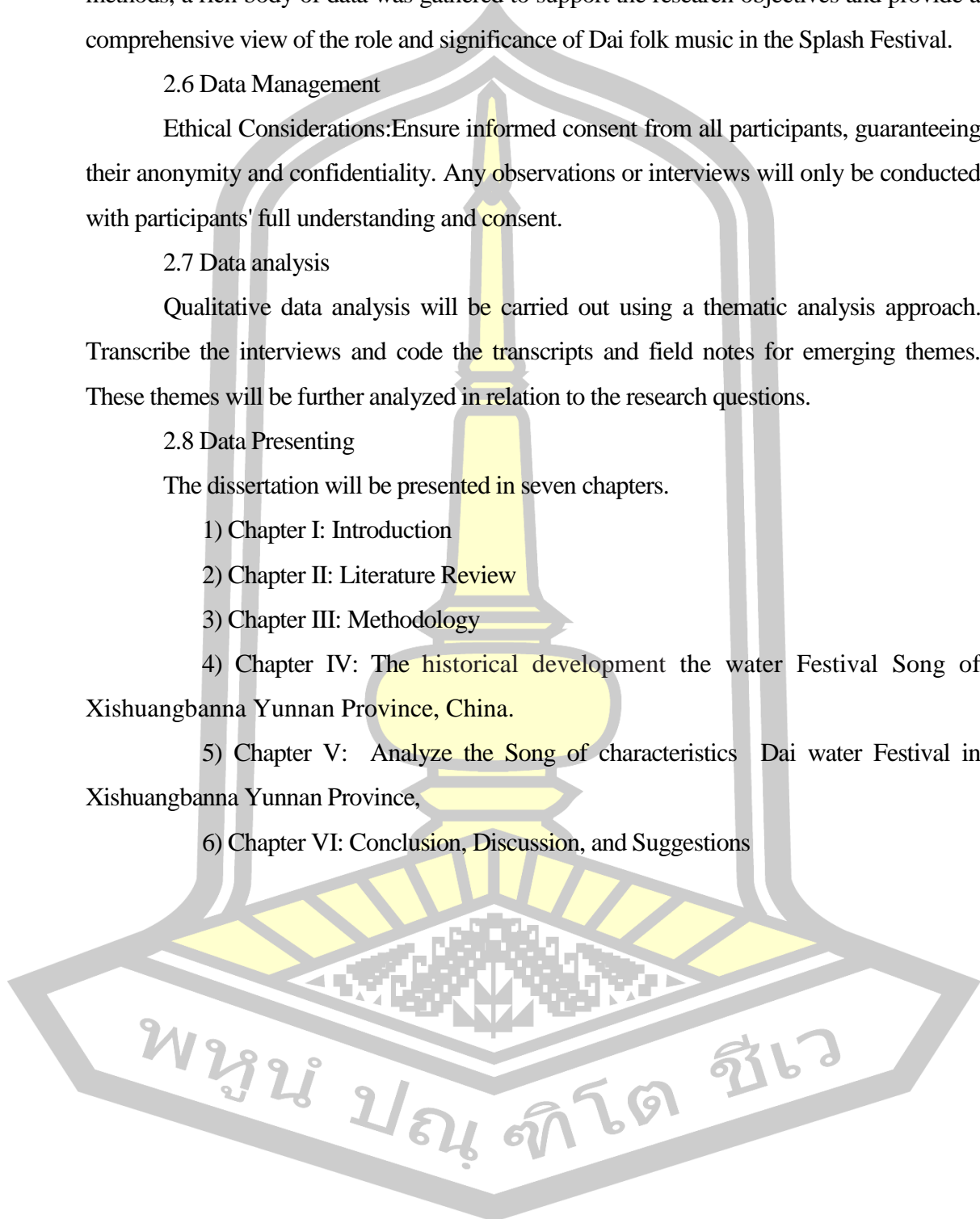
2.7 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis will be carried out using a thematic analysis approach. Transcribe the interviews and code the transcripts and field notes for emerging themes. These themes will be further analyzed in relation to the research questions.

2.8 Data Presenting

The dissertation will be presented in seven chapters.

- 1) Chapter I: Introduction
- 2) Chapter II: Literature Review
- 3) Chapter III: Methodology
- 4) Chapter IV: The historical development the water Festival Song of Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China.
- 5) Chapter V: Analyze the Song of characteristics Dai water Festival in Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province,
- 6) Chapter VI: Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions



CHAPTER IV

The historical development the water Festival Song of Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China

This chapter describes the development status of the water festival song from the following aspects:

1. Dai Ethnic Group and the Water Festival
 - 1.1 Significance of the Water Festival
 - 1.2 Origins of the Water Festival
 - 1.3 Key Rituals and Practices of the Water Festival
2. The Historical Development of the Water Festival song
 - 1.1 Early Developments
 - 1.2 Changes in the Qing Dynasty and the Republican Era

1. Dai Ethnic Group and the Water Festival

The Dai ethnic group, primarily residing in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, is one of the officially recognized ethnic minorities in China. Known for their unique culture, traditions, and connection with nature, the Dai people have long regarded water as a vital element of life, both materially and spiritually. The Water Festival, also known as "Songkran" or "Pi Mai," serves as a cornerstone of Dai cultural identity and embodies their reverence for water (Jin Yongsen, 2022)

1.1 Significance of the Water Festival

The Water Festival holds immense cultural, social, and spiritual significance for the Dai people in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, and beyond. As the most celebrated festival in Dai culture, it not only marks the start of the traditional Dai New Year but also serves as a profound expression of their beliefs, values, and communal identity. Its multifaceted significance can be understood through the following dimensions:

Cultural Significance

The Water Festival is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the Dai people. It serves as a living repository of their traditions, preserving their rituals,

music, dance, and folklore. Through activities like pouring water, offering blessings, and performing traditional dances, the festival reinforces the continuity of Dai cultural heritage. Each element of the celebration—be it the music, the vibrant costumes, or the symbolic use of water—encapsulates aspects of Dai history and identity.

Moreover, the festival is an important occasion for storytelling and oral history. Elders often recount the mythical origins of the Water Festival, such as the tale of Nang Sa and the dragon, which underscores the cultural ideals of bravery, resilience, and harmony with nature.

Social Significance

The Water Festival functions as a vital social glue, bringing together individuals, families, and entire communities. It provides an opportunity for communal bonding, as people come together to celebrate, reflect, and share their hopes for the new year. The act of splashing water—a central ritual of the festival—is imbued with social meaning, symbolizing the washing away of past grievances and the renewal of friendships and familial ties.

In addition, the festival fosters intergenerational connections. Younger generations participate in traditional activities under the guidance of their elders, ensuring that customs and values are transmitted across ages. The Water Festival also serves as a platform for social matchmaking, as young people take the opportunity to meet and interact in a celebratory environment.

Spiritual Significance

Water is revered in Dai culture as a sacred element representing purification, life, and renewal. During the Water Festival, water becomes a medium for spiritual cleansing, washing away sins and misfortunes from the previous year. The ritual of pouring water over Buddha statues, monks, and fellow participants is deeply tied to the Theravada Buddhist beliefs practiced by the Dai people. This act is seen as an offering that brings merit, blessings, and good fortune.

The festival also marks a time of spiritual reflection and prayer. Visits to temples, offerings to monks, and chanting rituals are integral components of the celebration, highlighting the Dai people's reverence for Buddhist teachings and their commitment to spiritual growth.

Ecological Significance

The timing of the Water Festival aligns with the onset of the rainy season, which is critical for agriculture in the region. Traditionally, the festival serves as a way to honor nature and pray for abundant rainfall and a successful harvest. This ecological dimension reflects the Dai people's close relationship with their natural environment, as their livelihoods have historically depended on harmonious coexistence with the land and water.

Economic Significance

In modern times, the Water Festival has also become an economic driver in Xishuangbanna. The region attracts numerous domestic and international tourists eager to experience the vibrant celebrations. This influx of visitors boosts local businesses, including tourism, hospitality, and handicrafts, while also providing a platform for the Dai community to showcase their culture on a global stage.

Symbol of Identity and Unity

Finally, the Water Festival is a powerful symbol of the Dai people's collective identity and cultural pride. It distinguishes them within the broader multicultural landscape of China and Southeast Asia, emphasizing their unique traditions and worldview. Through the celebration, the Dai community reaffirms their cultural distinctiveness while also promoting unity and inclusivity, as people from diverse backgrounds are welcomed to participate in the festivities (Liu Jia, 2014).

1.2 Origins of the Water Festival

The Water Festival of the Dai people in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, is deeply rooted in their ancient traditions and mythology. Its origins trace back to the intersection of folk beliefs, agricultural practices, and spiritual reverence for natural elements. These roots are enshrined in the myths and stories passed down through generations, making the festival not only a time for celebration but also a profound cultural and historical legacy.

Mythological Origins

One of the most well-known myths associated with the Water Festival is the legend of the seven Nang Sa sisters. According to this tale, a fearsome demon once terrorized the Dai people. Using his magical powers, the demon forced a young woman, Nang Sa, to marry him. The demon, however, underestimated Nang Sa's cleverness. She discovered the demon's weakness—his life essence was hidden within

a hair—and used this knowledge to end his reign of terror. When Nang Sa and her sisters killed the demon, his severed head burst into flames, threatening to destroy the world. To prevent this, each sister took turns holding the flaming head, cooling it with water. This myth encapsulates several key themes central to Dai culture: the triumph of good over evil, the symbolic importance of water as a life-giving and protective force, and the role of collective effort in overcoming challenges. The act of splashing water during the festival is said to reenact this myth, symbolizing the purification of evil and the ushering in of blessings and prosperity.

Connection to Nature and Agriculture

The ancient roots of the Water Festival are closely tied to the agricultural cycles of the Dai people, who have historically relied on rice farming for their livelihoods. Water, as a vital resource, is revered not only for its practical significance but also for its spiritual implications. The timing of the festival, which coincides with the onset of the rainy season, reflects the community's dependence on rainfall for a successful harvest. In ancient times, rituals performed during the Water Festival often included prayers and offerings to water spirits, seeking their blessings for abundant rainfall and fertile fields. The festival also marked the transition from the dry season to the rainy season, emphasizing renewal, growth, and harmony with nature (Qu Liuyi, 1997)

Folk Beliefs and Animism

Before the introduction of Theravada Buddhism, the Dai people practiced animism, which deeply influenced their early celebrations. Animistic beliefs regarded rivers, lakes, and other water bodies as sacred, inhabited by powerful spirits that controlled the natural order. The festival's rituals, such as pouring water onto statues and into rivers, were initially intended to appease these spirits, ensuring their favor and protection for the community. The spiritual act of using water to cleanse and purify reflects the animistic idea that water holds the power to wash away misfortunes, sins, and impurities. This belief laid the foundation for the symbolic role of water in the modern festival, where the act of splashing water on others is seen as a gesture of blessing, healing, and goodwill.

Influences of Theravada Buddhism

The introduction and integration of Theravada Buddhism into the Dai cultural sphere have profoundly shaped the Water Festival in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province. This religious influence has transformed the festival from its animistic and agrarian roots into a celebration rich with Buddhist symbolism and practices, while still preserving elements of its ancient heritage. The interplay between Theravada Buddhism and the Water Festival reflects the Dai people's ability to harmonize spiritual, cultural, and communal aspects of life.

Theravada Buddhism, also known as the "Teaching of the Elders," is the dominant form of Buddhism practiced among the Dai people. It arrived in the region through historical trade and cultural exchanges with Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. Over centuries, Theravada Buddhism became deeply intertwined with the daily lives of the Dai, influencing their worldview, ethics, and rituals. The religion's emphasis on purity, merit-making, and spiritual renewal seamlessly integrated with the pre-existing cultural framework of the Water Festival.

Summary

The Water Festival, celebrated by the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, is a vibrant expression of cultural identity, social unity, and spiritual reverence. Known as "Songkran" or "Pi Mai," it marks the Dai New Year and highlights their deep connection to water as a symbol of life, purification, and renewal. The festival serves as a living repository of Dai traditions, blending rituals, music, dance, and storytelling with significant social functions, such as fostering communal bonds and intergenerational connections. Its origins are rooted in mythology, agricultural practices, and animistic beliefs, later enriched by Theravada Buddhist influences that emphasize merit-making and spiritual growth. Beyond cultural and spiritual dimensions, the festival aligns with agricultural cycles, symbolizing harmony with nature, while also driving tourism and showcasing Dai culture globally. The Water Festival thus embodies the Dai people's resilience, cultural pride, and harmonious coexistence with their environment and traditions.

1.3 Key Rituals and Practices of the Water Festival

The Water Festival is celebrated with a rich tapestry of traditional rituals and offerings, each imbued with profound cultural and spiritual significance. These practices reflect the Dai people's deep reverence for water as a life-giving and

purifying force, their devotion to Theravada Buddhism, and their commitment to preserving communal harmony. The rituals and offerings form the heart of the festival, blending religious devotion, cultural expression, and social cohesion.



Figure 6. Xishuangbanna Buddhist Temple

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

Figure 6 : shows the process of monks going to the Xishuangbanna Main Buddhist Temple during the Buddha Bathing Festival.

Bathing the Buddha:

One of the most sacred rituals of the Water Festival is the bathing of Buddha statues, symbolizing purification, renewal, and reverence. This act holds deep spiritual meaning for the Dai people, aligning with Buddhist teachings on cleansing the mind and body.

In temples and homes, Buddha statues are placed on elevated platforms adorned with flowers, incense, and sacred cloth. Devotees pour perfumed or scented water over the statues using silver bowls or traditional bamboo vessels. This act is performed with great care and devotion, accompanied by prayers and chants.



Figure 7. Xishuangbanna Escorting Buddha statues

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

Figure 7: shows the process of escorting the Buddha statue during the Buddha Bathing Festival in Xishuangbanna, which was completed at the Zongfo Temple.

The bathing of Buddha statues represents the washing away of impurities and the renewal of spiritual energy. It is also seen as an offering of gratitude for the Buddha's teachings, with the water used in the ritual considered blessed and often sprinkled on devotees for good fortune.



Figure 8. Xishuangbanna Buddha statues at Buddha Bathing Festival

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

The most iconic and joyous ritual of the Water Festival is the communal water splashing, which has both symbolic and social dimensions. Participants arm themselves with buckets, bowls, and water guns, engaging in a playful yet meaningful exchange of water.



Figure 9. bathing the Buddha statue

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

This activity often begins with elders or monks symbolically sprinkling water on younger participants as a blessing before transforming into a lively water fight involving the entire community.

Water Splashing:

The most iconic and joyous ritual of the Water Festival is the communal water splashing, which has both symbolic and social dimensions. Participants arm themselves with buckets, bowls, and water guns, engaging in a playful yet meaningful exchange of water. This activity often begins with elders or monks symbolically sprinkling water on younger participants as a blessing before transforming into a lively water fight involving the entire community. Water splashing symbolizes purification, the washing away of past misfortunes, and the bestowal of blessings for the year ahead. It also reflects themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and the renewal of relationships, as participants engage in the ritual with joy and goodwill (Ren Xue, 2013)

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Figure 10. Splashing water

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

During this ritual, traditional songs, dances, and instrumental music add vibrancy to the atmosphere. Women in colorful Dai costumes often lead traditional dances, while musicians play bamboo flutes, drums, and cymbals, creating a festive ambiance.

Offering Alms to Monks:

Almsgiving is a central element of the Water Festival, reflecting the Dai people's devotion to Theravada Buddhist principles such as generosity and compassion. Families prepare offerings of food, flowers, incense, and water, which are presented to monks during temple ceremonies. Monks often chant blessings in return, creating a reciprocal exchange of spiritual merit. Almsgiving is a key merit-making activity in Buddhism. It is believed to purify the giver's mind, generate positive karma, and foster a sense of interconnectedness between the lay community and the monastic order. This ritual reinforces the social and spiritual ties within the community. By supporting the monks, the Dai people maintain the temples as centers of cultural and religious life (Zeng Anxiu, 2007)

Ritual Offerings to Ancestors and Nature Spirits:

The Dai people honor their ancestors and nature spirits during the Water Festival, reflecting their animistic heritage and agricultural traditions. Families gather to make offerings at ancestral altars or sacred sites such as rivers, trees, and rocks.

These offerings often include rice, fruits, flowers, and incense. Rituals may involve prayers, chants, and the lighting of candles, seeking blessings for prosperity, health, and harmony. These offerings signify respect for ancestors, gratitude for their guidance, and a desire to maintain harmony with the natural world. By honoring nature spirits, the Dai people express their dependence on the environment for sustenance and well-being.

Processions and Temple Visits:

Processions and temple visits are integral to the Water Festival, combining religious devotion with cultural celebration. Elaborate processions featuring Buddha statues, monks, and community leaders are carried through the streets, often accompanied by traditional music and dance. Villagers line the streets to pour water on the statues as a sign of respect.



Figure 11. Monks procession

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

Devotees visit temples to participate in ceremonies, meditate, and seek blessings from monks. Temples are decorated with colorful banners, lanterns, and flowers, creating a serene yet festive atmosphere. Processions and temple visits emphasize community participation and shared spiritual devotion. They also provide an opportunity for individuals to reflect on Buddhist teachings and renew their commitment to living a virtuous life.

Summary

The Water Festival, celebrated by the Dai ethnic group in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, is a vibrant blend of cultural, spiritual, and communal traditions. As

a cornerstone of Dai identity, the festival marks the New Year and reflects the people's reverence for water as a symbol of purification, renewal, and life. Rooted in ancient agrarian practices and enriched by Theravada Buddhist influences, the festival features key rituals such as bathing Buddha statues, communal water splashing, offering alms to monks, honoring ancestors and nature spirits, and engaging in processions and temple visits. These rituals symbolize themes of cleansing, gratitude, and unity while reinforcing social cohesion and spiritual devotion. The festival's development over centuries highlights its adaptability, cultural diplomacy, and enduring role in preserving Dai heritage. Modern elements like tourism further enhance its global significance while maintaining its deep cultural and spiritual roots.

2. The Historical Development of the Water Festival song

2.1 Early Forms and Evolution

The origins of the Water Festival song in Xishuangbanna can be traced back to the ancient oral traditions of the Dai people, who have relied on music as a primary medium for storytelling, religious rituals, and communal bonding. These early songs were not only artistic expressions but also served functional roles in religious and social settings. Before the advent of written records, Dai folk songs were passed down orally from generation to generation. These early Water Festival songs were typically performed in informal settings, such as village gatherings, temple ceremonies, and family celebrations. Elders and musicians played a crucial role in preserving these songs, ensuring that younger generations learned the lyrics, melodies, and cultural meanings embedded in them. The lyrics were often simple and repetitive, making them easy to memorize and pass on.

The early forms of Water Festival songs were characterized by pentatonic scales, which are common in traditional Dai music. The melodies were often slow and flowing, resembling the movement of water, which symbolized purity, renewal, and prosperity in Dai culture. These songs were typically performed in call-and-response formats, with a lead singer presenting a phrase and the audience or a chorus responding. This form of singing created a sense of communal participation, reinforcing the collective spirit of the festival.

Rhythmically, early Water Festival songs relied on natural patterns derived from the surrounding environment. The sounds of flowing rivers, rustling leaves, and temple bells influenced the percussive elements of these songs. The elephant foot drum and hand-held gongs, such as the Mang Luó (铙锣), were commonly used to provide rhythmic accompaniment, creating a steady and meditative beat that complemented the serene yet festive atmosphere of the festival.

Theravada Buddhism, which has been deeply integrated into Dai culture for centuries, played a crucial role in shaping the early forms of Water Festival songs. Many of these songs contained Buddhist teachings, prayers, and blessings, reflecting themes of karma, purification, and spiritual rebirth. The act of singing these songs was considered a form of merit-making, believed to bring good fortune to individuals and the community as a whole. Monks and temple musicians were among the key figures responsible for composing and performing these songs. The lyrics often referenced Buddhist scriptures and legends, narrating stories of Siddhartha Gautama's enlightenment, the significance of water as a purifying force, and the importance of compassion and generosity.

In the earliest days of the Water Festival, songs were performed in various settings, each with a specific function:

Temple Ceremonies: Water Festival songs were performed during religious rituals, where monks and devotees gathered to chant and offer prayers. The slow and solemn melodies matched the reverent mood of these occasions.

Community Gatherings: Villagers would come together to celebrate the festival, and songs were sung to accompany traditional dances, storytelling sessions, and social interactions. These songs had a lively and rhythmic nature, encouraging participation and engagement.

Blessing Rituals: Songs were often sung while sprinkling or pouring water over Buddha statues, monks, and fellow participants. This act symbolized purification and renewal, and the accompanying music helped reinforce the spiritual significance of the ritual.

The early forms of Water Festival songs were shaped not only by local traditions but also by cultural exchanges with neighboring regions, including Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. Given that the Water Festival, or Songkran, is celebrated across Southeast Asia, musical elements from these cultures influenced Dai

folk songs. Over time, the melodies, scales, and instrumentation of Water Festival songs began to incorporate elements of traditional Thai and Lao music, leading to a more diverse musical landscape within Dai communities. As the Water Festival became more organized and widely celebrated, the music evolved from spontaneous folk performances to more structured compositions. Musicians and composers began to create designated songs for specific rituals and celebrations, ensuring that music remained an integral part of the festival. The introduction of written notation in the 20th century allowed these compositions to be documented, preventing the loss of traditional melodies and lyrics. By the early 20th century, professional ensembles emerged, specializing in performing Water Festival songs at official ceremonies and large-scale events. These ensembles often included traditional Dai instruments, such as the hulusi, piwang (a type of bowed string instrument), and bronze drums, which added depth and richness to the musical arrangements.

2.4 Modern Developments and Contemporary Adaptations

In the modern era, the Water Festival song has undergone significant transformations due to technological advancements, cultural exchanges, and globalization. While traditional elements remain central to these songs, contemporary adaptations have introduced new musical elements, instruments, and performance styles, making the songs more accessible and appealing to broader audiences.

Traditionally, Water Festival songs were performed with simple instrumental accompaniments such as the hulusi, elephant foot drum, and Mang Luó (铓锣). However, contemporary adaptations have incorporated modern musical instruments such as the electronic keyboard, electric guitar, bass guitar, and drum set. These additions have enhanced the overall sound texture, making the songs more vibrant and rhythmically diverse. The influence of pop music, jazz, and electronic dance music (EDM) can be observed in many modern renditions of Water Festival songs. Melodic structures have become more varied, and rhythmic patterns have been adjusted to align with modern musical preferences. Traditional pentatonic scales are sometimes fused with major and minor Western scales, creating a richer harmonic palette.

With the rise of the digital age, Water Festival songs have found a new platform for global dissemination. Streaming services, online music platforms, and social media have allowed Dai musicians to share their music with a worldwide

audience. Many artists now release professional studio recordings of Water Festival songs, incorporating high-quality production techniques such as multi-track layering, digital reverb, and synthesizer effects to modernize the traditional sound.

Additionally, music videos and live performances have become essential tools for promoting Water Festival songs. These videos often blend traditional visual aesthetics with contemporary cinematographic techniques, attracting both local and international listeners. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Douyin have played a significant role in popularizing these songs among younger generations.

Modern adaptations of Water Festival songs often blend traditional folk elements with contemporary genres such as:

Pop Music: Simplified and catchy melodies, along with structured verse-chorus formats, make the songs more relatable to a younger audience.

Electronic Dance Music (EDM): Many songs have been remixed with electronic beats and synthesizers to create a high-energy festival atmosphere.

Hip-Hop and Rap: Some adaptations include rap verses that convey cultural themes in a modern lyrical style, appealing to urban youth.

World Music Collaborations: Water Festival songs have also been performed alongside musicians from other cultural backgrounds, fostering cross-cultural musical exchanges.

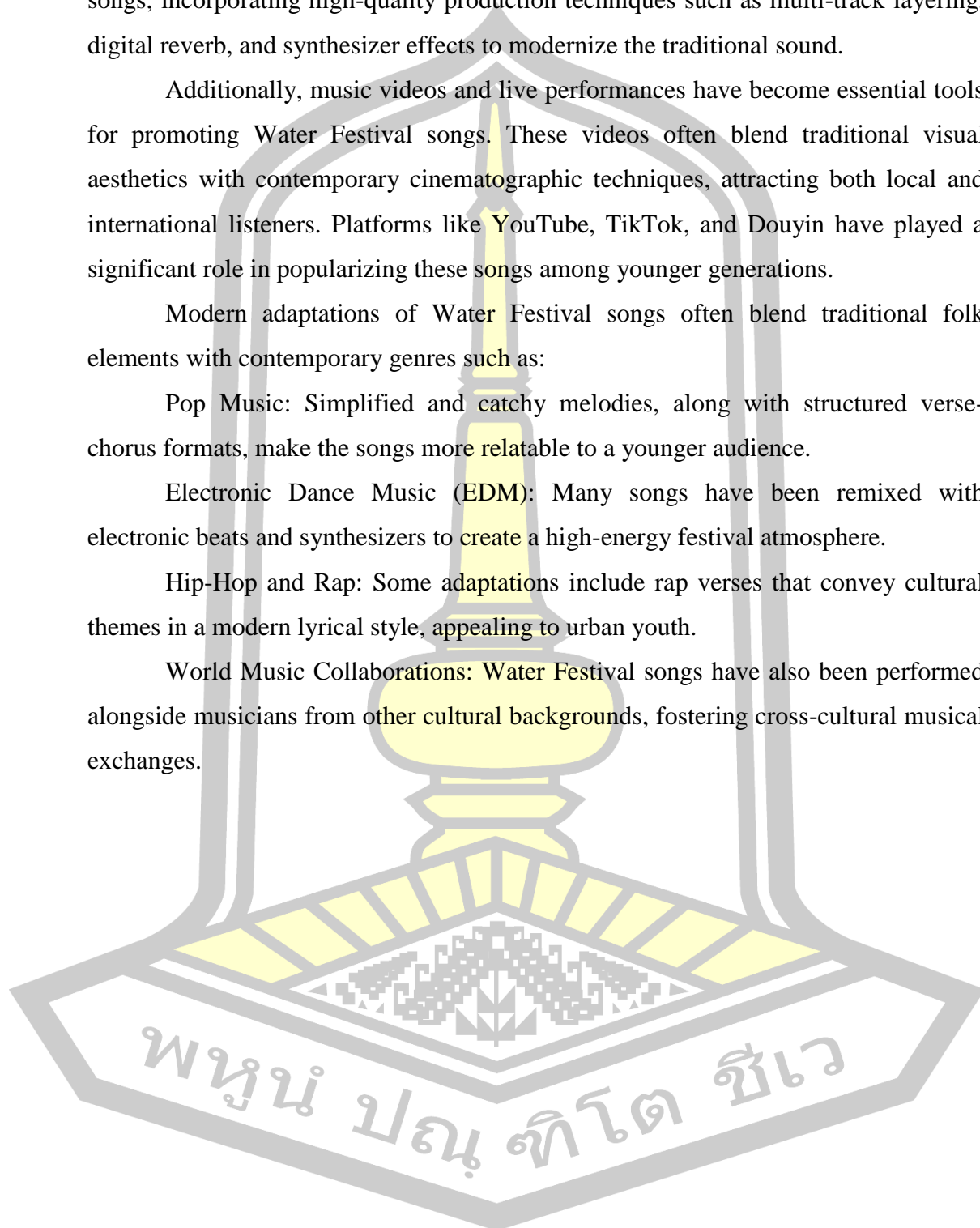


Table 1. Simple History Table of Water Festival Songs

Stage	Features	Instruments	Purpose
Early Tradition	Passed down by singing; easy lyrics; group singing.	Drums, gongs	Bring people together; share culture
Buddhist Influence	Songs about Buddhist ideas; used in temple events	Bells, hand drums	Pray, bless, do good deeds
Cultural Exchange	Added styles from Thai and Lao music.	Mixed styles	Mix cultures; show Dai identity.
Structured Songs	Written down and used in ceremonies.	Traditional Dai instruments”	Save songs for future; teach culture.
Performance Groups	Played by trained groups with local instruments.	Hulusi, piwang, bronze drums	Show in big events.
Modern Style	Used pop, rap, EDM; shared online and in videos	Keyboard, guitar, drum set	Reach youth; share worldwide

Summary

The modern development and adaptation of the Water Festival song illustrate how tradition can evolve in response to contemporary influences while maintaining its cultural essence. By integrating modern musical elements, utilizing digital platforms, and exploring fusion genres, Water Festival songs have expanded their reach to a global audience. At the same time, cultural preservation efforts ensure that the authenticity of these songs remains intact. The balance between tradition and modernization allows the Water Festival song to thrive, connecting past generations with the present and ensuring its continued relevance in the future.

CHAPTER V

The characteristics of Dai folk song water Festival in Xishuangbanna Yunnan Province, China

In this chapter, the researchers use the method of musicology, combined with the data collected by field investigation and literature research, and comprehensively use the survey and analysis methods of traditional Chinese music, and combine them with relevant theories and methods such as music sociology, ethnomusicology, and communication studies to analyze the musical characteristics of Xishuangbanna Dai Water Festival songs, including singing, performance skills and characteristics, and representative works. Water Festival music mainly includes three parts: singing, accompaniment instruments, and band style.

Based on the field survey and the recommendations of the interviewees, I selected a representative song for analysis. "Ganbai Guilai"

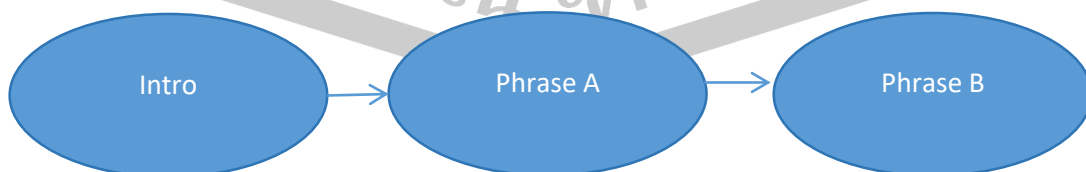
1. Musical structure
2. "Musical instruments used for singing accompaniments"
3. Melody
4. singing

Ganbai Guilai

The characteristics of music are analyzed from four aspects: singing style, musical instruments used for singing accompaniments, band style and tunes.

1. "Ganbai Guilai" musical structure

The figure below shows the structure of the Buddha and the "Gan Bai Gui Lai" send, which can be divided into the following categories:



The detailed analysis of the musical form of "Ganbai Guilai" is as follows:

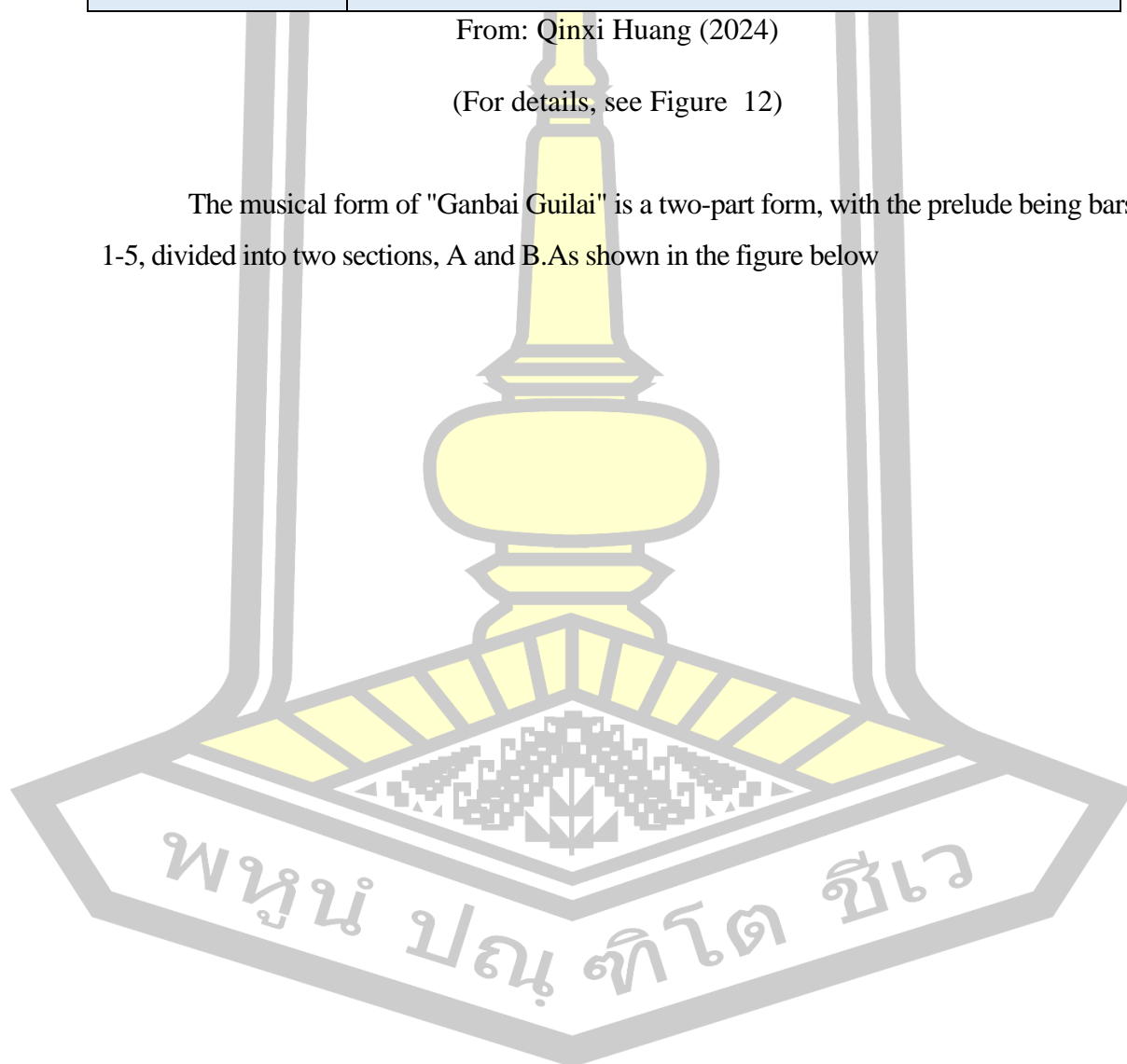
Table 2. The musical sections of "Ganbai Guilai"

Section	1	2	3
Phrase	1-5	6-15	15-25
Form	Intro	A phrase	B phrase
Tonality	G Gong Mode		
Tempo	100		
Beat	4/4		

From: Qinxu Huang (2024)

(For details, see Figure 12)

The musical form of "Ganbai Guilai" is a two-part form, with the prelude being bars 1-5, divided into two sections, A and B. As shown in the figure below



赶摆归来
Ganbai Guilai

Transcription by Qinxi Huang

Intro

$\text{♩} = 100$

5
赶摆那天我遇见你 是你偷走了我的心
gan bai na tian wo yu jian ni shi ni tou zou le wo de xin

9
从此我天天想着你 身心已经两分离 两分离
cong ci wo tian tian xiang zhe ni shen xin yi jing liang fen li liang fen li

12
茫茫人海我寻找你 找不到你我心焦急 想拿根绳子来找你
mang mang ren hai wo xun zhao ni zhao bu dao ni wo xin jiao ji xiang na gen shen zi lai zhao ni

15
把你我俩紧紧捆绑在一起 在一起 花再美也不如你
ba ni wo liang jin jin kun bang zai yi qi zai yi qi hua zai mei ye bu ru ni

18
我已经爱上你 花再香也不如你 梦里见到你
wo yi jing ai shang ni hua zai xiang ye bu ru ni men li jian dao ni

21
花再美也不如你 我已爱上你 花再香也不如你
hua zai mei ye bu ru ni wo yi ai shang ni hua zai xiang ye bu ru ni

24
总是在梦里见到你
zong shi zai meng li jian dao ni

Figure 12. Ganbai Guilai

Source: Qinxi Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

The first four measures of the sheet music serve as the introduction (Intro), typically used to establish the key and atmosphere of the piece. The melody is set in a 4/4 time signature, with a steady tempo marked at $\text{♩} = 100$, indicating a moderate pace. The main phrase, Phrase A, begins at measure 7, forming the first complete musical phrase, ending in measure 11 on the dominant note (D) of the main key (G mode). This phrase is repeated in measure 9 with slight variations. The melody progresses smoothly, combining stepwise and leapwise motion, making it cohesive and easy to sing. From measure 12, Phrase A is played a second time, essentially repeating the earlier phrase and enhancing the melody's

recognizability and memorability. This repetition strengthens the piece's overall coherence and deepens the listener's impression of the main theme. It concludes in measure 16, again ending on the dominant note (D), creating an open ending.

Measure 17 introduces Phrase B, which features a more active melody with slight rhythmic variations, adding a sense of contrast and dynamic to the overall structure. The lyrics and melody in this section contain emotional fluctuations, marking it as a crucial developmental segment of the piece. As shown in the figure 13

15

B Phrases

把你我俩紧紧捆绑在一起在一起
ba ni wo liang jin jin kun bang zai yi qi zai yi qi

花再美也不如你
hua zai mei ye bu ru ni

Figure 13. Ganbai Guilai B phrases

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

From measure 21, Phrase B is repeated, intensifying the climax of the music and enhancing its emotional impact. The final line in measure 24 brings the music to a close with a relatively complete melody, leaving a lingering resonance.

21

Repeat phrases

花再美也不如你我已爱上你
hua zai mei ye bu ru ni wo yi ai shang ni

花再香也不如你
hua zai xiang ye bu ru ni

Figure 14. Ganbai Guilai repeat phrases

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

The piece follows an A-B form, with section A occupying a significant portion, characterized by a regular and highly repetitive melody, making it smooth and memorable. Section B, serving as a contrasting part, enriches the overall form, preventing monotony. The melody employs extensive stepwise motion, ensuring a natural flow, while occasional leaps add tension and dynamism to the music.

2. Musical instruments used for singing accompaniments

The accompaniment of the piece Ganbai Guilai features a rich blend of instruments, combining traditional and modern elements. Traditional instruments include the hulusi,

elephant foot drum, and Mang Luó (铎锣), while modern instruments include a drum set, bass, guitar, and electronic keyboard.

Table 3. Musical Instruments Used in Ganbai Guilai

Instrument	Type	Description
Hulusi	Wind	Traditional gourd flute with a pure and simple timbre, often used in folk melodies.
Elephant Foot Drum	Percussion	Large drum made of wood and cowhide, used in traditional Dai performances and dances.
Mang Luó (铎锣)	Percussion	A nipple gong made of bronze, commonly used among various ethnic groups for rhythm.
Drum Set	Percussion	A modern rhythm section instrument, maintaining tempo and rhythm in performances.
Bass	String	Provides the bassline in modern arrangements, supporting harmony and rhythm.
Guitar	String	Used for harmonic and melodic support, commonly played in folk and contemporary music.
Electronic Keyboard	Keyboard	Synthesizes various instrument sounds, enhancing the richness of the arrangement.

1) “Hulusi”

The hulusi, also known as the "gourd flute," is a traditional musical instrument of the ethnic minorities in Yunnan. Its origins can be traced back to the pre-Qin period. The hulusi originated in Lianghe County, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, and is primarily popular in the Dehong and Lincang regions of Yunnan, where the Dai, Achang, Wa, De'ang, and Blang ethnic groups reside, giving it a strong local flavor. It is often used to play folk melodies such as mountain songs and farming tunes. The hulusi can be categorized into three types: high, middle, and low pitch. It is characterized by its unique, pure, and simple timbre, as well as its plain yet exquisite appearance. The instrument has a distinctive shape and structure, consisting of a natural gourd, three bamboo pipes, and three metal reeds. The gourd serves as the air chamber, and three bamboo pipes of varying

thickness are inserted into the bottom of the gourd. Each bamboo pipe contains a reed made of copper or silver at the portion inserted into the gourd.



Figure 15. Hulusi

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

The central bamboo pipe is the thickest and is equipped with several tone holes; this is called the main pipe. The two side pipes, called auxiliary pipes, are fitted with reeds but have no tone holes (in traditional hulusi). They can only produce harmonics resonating with the main pipe. Typically, the left auxiliary pipe produces the note "mi" (3), while the right auxiliary pipe remains silent.

2) "Elephant foot drum"

The Guangya, also known as Guangtun or "elephant foot drum," means "long-tailed drum" or "short drum." It is an important traditional percussion instrument of the Dai ethnic group, beloved by the Dai people and widely used in song and dance performances as well as in Dai opera accompaniment. The Guangya resembles an exquisite tall wine goblet in shape. It is made from a single piece of wood (or several pieces joined together), hollowed out entirely. The upper part forms a goblet-shaped resonating chamber covered with drum skin, which is tightened around the edges with thin cowhide strips. These strips are fastened to the lower part of the drum body and can be adjusted to regulate tension. The drum's exterior is lacquered, with decorative patterns carved on its waist and lower half. Some Guangya drums also feature floral silk ribbons or colorful balls tied to the drum

body. The Guangya is often used as a rhythmic and expressive percussion instrument, capable of imitating human speech in rhythmic patterns to convey a wide range of emotions, such as joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness. Historically, the Guangya was mainly used in Theravada Buddhist temples for religious ceremonies, where it was played without accompanying dance. Later, it spread to the general public, where performances involving both playing and dancing emerged, though these were typically solo acts by the player.



Figure 16. elephant foot drum

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

Due to its heavy weight, the Guangya is not played alone but often combined with other instruments such as the kai and liao to accompany various Dai folk dances, including the Peacock Dance, Deer Dance, White Elephant Dance, and Scarf Dance. In 2011, the drum-making technique of the Dai's elephant foot drum was recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage of China.

3) Mang Luó (铙锣)

The Mang Luó (铙锣), also known as Mang or Dong Luó (Winter Gong), is a type of gong named for its prominent, dome-shaped boss in the center, which resembles a nipple. Hence, it is also referred to as Nipple Gong, Breast Gong, or Bag Gong. It is a traditional percussion idiophone commonly used by many ethnic groups, including the Dai,

Jingpo, Wa, Achang, Hani, De'ang, Blang, Lahu, Lisu, Dulong, Jino, Nu, Yi, Naxi, Hui, Bouyei, Tujia, Zhuang, Miao, Maonan, Han, and Khamu people. The Mang Luó is known by different names among these groups: it is called Beng by the Jingpo, Lopeng or Gelongmeng by the Wa, Meng or Gongmeng by the De'ang, and Long or Dong by the Dulong, among others. The gong is entirely cast from bronze, with a circular disk shape and a hemispherical boss in the center. The surface of the gong is uneven, and the edge features a raised rim that is slightly wider than other types of gongs.



Figure 17. Mang Luó (铙锣)

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

The size of the Mang Luó varies, and it comes in several specifications, commonly categorized as large, medium, and small: Large gong: Diameter of 40 cm, edge width of 6 cm, boss diameter of 7 cm, and boss height of 5 cm. Medium gong: Diameter of 30 cm, edge width of 5 cm, boss diameter of 6.5 cm, and boss height of 4 cm. Small gong: Diameter of 20 cm, edge width of 3.5 cm, boss diameter of 6 cm, and boss height of 3 cm.

The raised rim on the gong's edge measures 0.5 cm to 1 cm in height, with a hole on one side of the rim for attaching a rope. The smallest gongs have a diameter of only 9 cm, an edge width of 1 cm, and can reach pitches as high as a². The largest gongs, with a diameter of 72 cm and an edge width of 14 cm, can produce low pitches of F or G.

4) Drum Set

The drum set was developed in the 1940s and incorporates a variety of hand-played and foot-played percussion instruments with diverse types and timbres. Hand-played instruments include the snare drum, tom-toms, and suspended cymbals, while foot-played instruments include the bass drum and hi-hat. Additional percussion instruments can be added or removed as needed for different performances. In a band, the drummer plays a crucial role in maintaining the tempo and rhythm of the music. This is especially important in jazz, where the drummer needs to work in close harmony with other musicians.



Figure 18. drum set

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

Bass Drum: Played with the right foot resting naturally on the pedal. When striking the drum, the ankle and foot remain relaxed, moving naturally with the pedal. **Hi-hat:** Played with the left foot. In the ready position, the heel is lifted. When playing, the heel moves down, followed by the ball of the foot, then back up. **Snare Drum:** Played with both hands using the wrist grip technique (palms facing down). Either hand can be used to play rhythms, depending on the requirement. **Hand Cymbal (Hi-hat played by hand):** Played with the right hand using a straight grip to strike various rhythms on the hi-hat. **Suspended Cymbal:** Played with either hand depending on the musical context. For simpler rhythms, the right hand is typically used.

5) Bass

The bass is one of the essential instruments in a band, primarily responsible for the bass line and, at times, improvisational solos. In traditional jazz, the acoustic bass (double bass) is typically used to preserve its authentic and original flavor. In modern jazz, particularly fusion jazz, electric basses or synthesized bass sounds from electronic synthesizers are commonly employed. The widespread development and popularity of electric instruments have significantly transformed bands. The number of members has been reduced, and a band can now typically consist of just four members: rhythm (drum set), bass (bass guitar), harmony (guitar), and melody (keyboard).



Figure 19. Bass

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

In electric bands, the bass refers to the bass guitar, which is essentially a low-pitched guitar. Its full name should be bass guitar. It uses the bass clef for notation and is written at pitch, without being transposed an octave higher.

6) Guitar

The guitar is often regarded as a primary instrument in genres such as pop, rock, blues, folk, and flamenco music. In the realm of classical music, the guitar is commonly performed as a solo or duet instrument. Additionally, it plays a supporting role in chamber music and orchestral works. The guitar's ancestry can be traced back 2,000–

3,000 years to ancient Egypt's nefer, as well as various ancient plucked string instruments from Babylon and Persia. Archaeologists have discovered the oldest instrument resembling the modern guitar, known as the "Hittite guitar," depicted on a city gate relief of the ancient Hittites who lived in Asia Minor and northern Syria around 1400 BCE.



Figure 20. Guitar

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

The guitar's distinctive hourglass-shaped body with inward curves contributes to its unique sound resonance and tonal qualities, making it stand out among other plucked string instruments. This shape has become one of the most defining features of the guitar.

7) Electronic keyboard

The electronic keyboard is an electronic keyboard instrument that falls under the category of electronic synthesizers. It uses large-scale integrated circuits, most of which are equipped with sound memory storage (wave tables) to store real sound waveforms of various instruments and output them during performance. Common types of electronic keyboards include arranger keyboards (with automatic accompaniment) and synthesizers (without automatic accompaniment). Broadly, the term "electronic keyboard" also includes digital pianos (distinct from electric pianos). Electronic keyboards typically use the grand staff (treble and bass clefs) for notation but may also use alto clefs, simplified notation, or guitar tablature. They are frequently employed in rock music. The instrument, also known

as an electronic keyboard, is a type of electronic instrument (different from electro-acoustic instruments), with adjustable volume. It features a wide pitch range, rich harmonics, and the ability to simulate the effect of an entire orchestra, offering an exceptionally expressive performance capability. An electronic keyboard can imitate various tones and even produce sounds that conventional instruments cannot create, such as choir effects, rain and wind sounds, or cosmic sounds. In solo performances, it can also provide rhythmic accompaniment resembling percussion instruments, making it suitable for playing rhythmically strong modern music.



Figure 21. electronic keyboard

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

Additionally, electronic keyboards are often equipped with effects such as reverb, echo, sustain, vibrato wheels, and modulation wheels. These features allow the player to freely express a wide range of emotions and musical ideas.

3. Melody characteristics

The melody of "Ganbai Guilai" is a typical traditional Chinese pentatonic scale. The pentatonic mode refers to a scale constructed by arranging five tones in melodic intervals of a perfect fifth. Its core structure is based on a three-note group consisting of a major second and a minor third. This three-note group serves as the foundation of the mode,

and the scale itself does not contain semitone relationships. There is a minor third relationship between Jue (角) and Zhi (徵), as well as between Yu (羽) and Gong (宫). The earliest recorded names of pentatonic scale tones can be found in Guanzi - Diyu Chapter (管子·地员篇): Gong (宫), Shang (商), Jue (角), Zhi (徵), and Yu (羽). The solmization system for these tones was later adapted from Western solfège as do, re, mi, sol, la. Each of the five tones in the pentatonic scale can function as the tonic, forming five different modes: Gong mode, Shang mode, Jue mode, Zhi mode, and Yu mode.

In Chinese music, there are also incomplete pentatonic modes based on three or four tones. Furthermore, the pentatonic system includes heptatonic scales, which are formed by adding two auxiliary tones to the pentatonic foundation (resulting in three types and fifteen modes), as well as hexatonic scales, which are created by adding only one auxiliary tone (resulting in three types and twenty modes). In both hexatonic and heptatonic scales, the core melodic movement remains pentatonic in nature, while the auxiliary tones serve a secondary, ornamental role.

"Ganbai Guilai" is a typical G gong(宫) mode, as shown in the figure 22



Figure 22. Map of G gong(宫) mode

Source: Qinxì Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

Gong mode (宫调式) is one of the five traditional Chinese pentatonic modes, with “Gong” (宫) as the tonic (similar to the tonic in Western music). If G is taken as the tonic, the G Gong Mode pentatonic scale is: G–A–C–D–E–(G) This scale is identical to the G Major Pentatonic Scale in Western music.

Table 4. The fundamental tones in G Gong Mode

Pentatonic Degree	Chinese Name	Western Solfège
Gong (宮)	G	DO
Shang (商)	A	Re
Jue (角)	C	Mi
Zhi (徵)	D	Sol
Yu (羽)	E	La

No semitones in the scale, consisting only of whole steps (major second) and minor thirds. Core Structure: Trichordal Groupings $G \rightarrow A$ (major second) $\rightarrow C$ (minor third) $D \rightarrow E$ (major second) $\rightarrow G$ (minor third). Smooth melodic flow with a distinctive national character, often used to express solemn, steady, and expansive emotions. Comparison with Western modes: Adding $F\#$ makes it closer to G Major. Adding B makes it resemble the G Mixolydian Mode. Although traditional Chinese music is primarily melody-based, modern compositions can incorporate harmonies to support melodies in G Gong Mode. Primary Chords (constructed from the pentatonic scale): G (I): G - C - D (Gong, Jue, Zhi) C (IV): C - G - E (Jue, Gong, Yu) D (V): D - A - E (Zhi, Shang, Yu) $G \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow G$ (similar to I - IV - V - I in Western music) $G \rightarrow D \rightarrow C \rightarrow G$ (creating a more authentic pentatonic flavor).

4. Singing characteristics

The song is in G Gong Mode (a pentatonic mode), with the melody revolving around G (宮, Gong), A (商, Shang), C (角, Jue), D (徵, Zhi), and E (羽, Yu). There are no semitones, and the melody follows pentatonic motion, making it bright, natural, and fluid. Overall, the first half of the song has a relatively stable melody, while the latter half moves toward a higher pitch range, enhancing emotional expression.

The singing characteristics of the Dai Water Festival song "Gaibai Guilai" The first characteristic of Songs of the Water Splashing Festival is that the melody of the song is brisk and lively, with a distinct rhythm, which can quickly drive the emotions of the audience and create a cheerful and warm festival atmosphere. The second characteristic is

that the lyrics are vivid and infectious. The lyrics usually depict the joyful scenes of the Water Splashing Festival, express the Dai people's love for life and good wishes for the future, and the language is vivid, the emotions are sincere, and they are very infectious.

The third characteristic is that the singing style is simple and natural. The singers often adopt a simple and natural style, and convey the connotation of the song perfectly to the audience through sincere emotions and vivid performances. The fourth characteristic is to emphasize emotional expression and interaction. During the singing process, the singers will pay attention to the emotional interaction with the audience, and establish a close emotional connection with the audience through eye contact, body movements, etc., and share the joy of the festival together. The fifth characteristic is to pay attention to the use and skills of the voice. The singers will flexibly use their voices to adjust the strength, height and timbre of the voice according to the emotions and rhythm changes of the song, so as to make the singing more vivid and touching. At the same time, some traditional Dai singing techniques, such as glissando and vibrato, are also used to add unique artistic charm to the songs.

First Phrase: "Ganbai na tian wo yu jian ni, shi ni tou zou le wo de xin" (赶摆那天我遇见你，是你偷走了我的心) As shown in the figure 23:



Figure 23. Map of First Phrase

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

Gan bai na tian wo yu jian ni" (赶摆那天我遇见你): The melody primarily follows G - A - C - D - E (Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi, Yu), mainly in stepwise motion. "Ganbai" (赶摆) is sung with an ascending interval of G → A, portraying a joyful and uplifting mood, reflecting the festive atmosphere of "Ganbai" (a traditional

market gathering)."Na tian" (那天) moves downward, providing a natural transition in the melody."Wo yu jian ni" (我遇见你) ascends stepwise C → D → E, adding a sense of excitement and delight in meeting a loved one."Shi ni tou zou le wo de xin" (是你偷走了我的心):The melody reaches a higher pitch D - E (In the eighth measure), symbolizing emotional intensity and a sense of heart-racing excitement."Tou zou" (偷走) follows a descending minor third (E → C), adding a gentle pull, expressing a sense of emotional longing.

Second Phrase: "Cong ci wo tian tian xiang zhe ni, shen xin yi jing liang fen li" (从此我天天想着你, 身心已经两分离) As shown in the figure 24:



Figure 24. Map of Second Phrase

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

"Cong ci wo tian tian xiang zhe ni" (从此我天天想着你):The melody primarily moves within A - C - D - E, combining stepwise motion and small leaps, creating a sentimental and longing feel."Tian tian" (天天) repeats the same note C - C, emphasizing the repetitive daily thoughts, reinforcing the theme of yearning. "Shen xin yi jing liang fen li" (身心已经两分离):The melody first descends by a minor third (E → C) and then continues downward to G, effectively depicting the sorrow and inner conflict of separation.

Third Phrase: "Mang mang ren hai wo xun zhao ni, zhao bu dao ni wo xin jiao ji" (茫茫人海我寻找你, 找不到你我心焦急) As shown in the figure 25:

12

茫 茫 人 海 我 寻 找 你 找 不 到 你 我 心 焦 急 想 拿 根 绳 子 来 找 你
 mang mang ren hai wo xun zhao ni zhao bu dao ni wo xin jiao ji xiang na gen shen zi lai zhao ni

15

Figure 25. Map of Third Phrase

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

The melody begins by repeating previous motifs (A-C-D-E), but in "Xun zhao ni" (寻找你), it ascends to D - E, conveying the sense of urgency in searching for someone."Zhao bu dao ni wo xin jiao ji" (找不到你我心焦急):The melody follows a descending motion (E → C → A), reflecting frustration and worry.The phrase "Jiao ji" (焦急) features a leaping motion (A → C → E), enhancing the emotional intensity of anxiety and desperation.

Fourth Phrase: "Ba ni wo liang jin jin kun bang zai yi qi, zai yi qi" (把你我俩紧紧拴绑在一起, 在一起) As shown in the figure 26:

15

把 你 我 俩 紧 紧 捆 绑 在 一 起 在 一 起 花 再 美 也 不 如 你
 ba ni wo liang jin jin kun bang zai yi qi zai yi qi hua zai mei ye bu ru ni

Figure 26. Map of Fourth Phrase

Source:Qinxi Huang ,transcription from research fieldwork ,April (2024)

"Ba ni wo liang jin jin kun bang zai yi qi" (把你我俩紧紧拴绑在一起):The melody contains more leaps (C → E → D → G), symbolizing the firmness and determination of being "tied together." "Zai yi qi" (在一起) reaches a melodic peak with D → E → G, representing the emotional climax of the song.

Chorus: "Wo yi ai shang ni, hua zai mei ye bu ru ni" (我已爱上你, 花再美也

不如你) As shown in the figure 27:



Figure 27. Map of Chorus

Source: Qinxu Huang, transcription from research fieldwork, April (2024)

"Wo yi ai shang ni" (我已爱上你): The melody follows a gradual ascending pattern (G → A → C → D → E), layering emotional intensity, conveying deep affection. The phrase "Ai shang ni" (爱上你) reaches E, symbolizing emotional elevation. "Hua zai mei ye bu ru ni" (花再美也不如你): The melody remains smooth, primarily centered around C - D - E, highlighting contrast (the beauty of flowers vs. the superior beauty of the beloved). "Bu ru ni" (不如你) features a descending motion (A → G → E), reinforcing sincerity and tenderness. Ending: "Zong shi zai meng li jian dao ni" (总是在梦里见到你): The melody moves fluidly between G → A → C → D → E, creating a dreamy effect. The long note (G) at the end gives a sense of closure while leaving a lingering emotional impact.

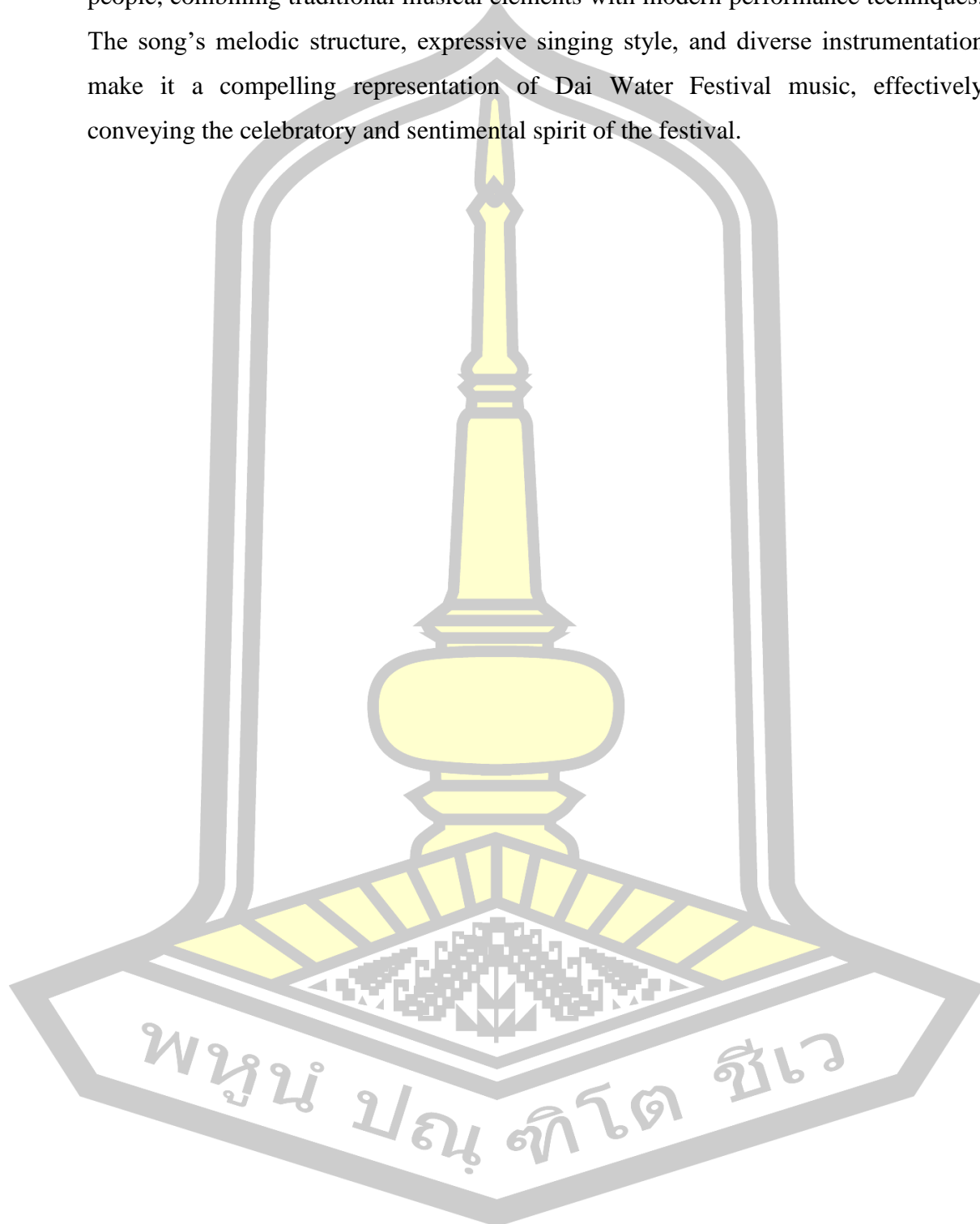
Emotional Interpretation: First half (narrative part): The melody is relatively stable, requiring controlled breath support to convey sweet memories and deep emotions. Chorus (lyrical part): The melody ascends, necessitating a brighter, more open voice to enhance emotional expression. Ending (dreamy atmosphere): A soft and airy tone with a gentle diminuendo (gradual softening) can enhance the dreamlike quality. Ethnic Vocal Style Timbre: A bright and natural timbre is recommended to enhance the fluidity of the melody. Ornamentation: Some light glides (滑音) in long

notes (e.g., in "Xin jiao ji" 心焦急) can add ethnic musical flavor. Phrasing: In "Tian tian" (天天), slight pauses between words create a more natural vocal expression.

Summary

This study analyzes the musical characteristics of Ganbai Guilai, a representative song performed during the Dai Water Festival, using methodologies from musicology, ethnomusicology, and field research. The analysis is divided into five key aspects: singing style, musical structure, musical instruments used for accompaniment, melody characteristics, and singing techniques. The singing style of Ganbai Guilai is characterized by a brisk and lively melody, a distinct rhythm, and vivid, emotionally expressive lyrics that depict the joy of the Water Festival and the Dai people's love for life. The song is performed in a natural and simple manner, with an emphasis on emotional interaction with the audience, incorporating traditional vocal techniques such as glissando and vibrato. Structurally, Ganbai Guilai follows an A-B form, with an introductory section (measures 1-5) setting the musical atmosphere. Section A (measures 6-16) features a highly repetitive and smooth melody, enhancing its memorability, while Section B (measures 17-24) introduces melodic variations and rhythmic contrast, leading to the song's climax and emotional peak. The instrumentation includes a blend of traditional and modern instruments. Traditional instruments such as the hulusi (gourd flute), elephant foot drum, and Mang Luó (gong) contribute to the ethnic musical identity, while modern elements like the drum set, bass guitar, electric keyboard, and guitar enhance the song's versatility and contemporary appeal. Melodically, the song is based on the G Gong Mode, a pentatonic scale (G - A - C - D - E) that lacks semitones, producing a bright, fluid, and natural sound. The melody primarily progresses stepwise, with occasional leaps that create tension and emotional depth. The singing characteristics of Ganbai Guilai highlight expressive phrasing, smooth melodic flow, and emotional variation. Each phrase demonstrates a careful balance between ascending and descending motions, reflecting the song's themes of joy, longing, and love. The final chorus and ending section reinforce a sense of emotional climax and resolution, leaving a lasting impression.

In conclusion, Ganbai Guilai embodies the rich cultural heritage of the Dai people, combining traditional musical elements with modern performance techniques. The song's melodic structure, expressive singing style, and diverse instrumentation make it a compelling representation of Dai Water Festival music, effectively conveying the celebratory and sentimental spirit of the festival.



CHAPTER VI

Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions

1. Conclusion

In this study, there are two research objectives: To investigate the historical development of the Water Festival Song in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China. To analyze the song characteristics of Dai folk songs in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, China. Based on field research and interviews, extensive data has been collected, analyzed, and compiled. The research results can be summarized as follows:

1.1 Study on the Development of Water Festival Songs

Based on historical documents and field research, the Water Festival songs in Xishuangbanna have developed through two main stages:

1.1.1 Early Forms and Evolution

Water Festival songs originated from ancient oral traditions of the Dai people. Before written records, the songs were passed down orally and performed in village gatherings, temple ceremonies, and family celebrations. Their melodies, based on pentatonic scales, were slow and flowing, symbolizing water and spiritual renewal. Songs were often performed in call-and-response style, emphasizing community participation. Instruments such as the elephant foot drum and Mang Luó (铓锣) were commonly used. Theravāda Buddhism deeply influenced the lyrical content, embedding themes of purification, karma, and blessing.

1.1.2 Modern Developments and Contemporary Adaptations

In recent decades, Water Festival songs have been modernized in response to cultural tourism and technological changes. Traditional instruments are now combined with electronic keyboard, guitar, bass, and drums. Pop music, EDM, and even rap elements have been integrated to attract younger audiences. These adaptations are widely shared through digital platforms such as YouTube and Douyin, increasing exposure while reshaping the musical style of the festival.

1.2 Study on the Musical Characteristics of Water Festival Songs

Musical Structure: Most songs follow a form of introduction, main phrase, and chorus. The structure supports both ritual and entertainment functions. **Melody:** The songs use pentatonic scales, with modal variation and ornamentation. The melodic line is smooth and flowing, symbolizing the movement of water. **Rhythm:** The rhythm is steady and repetitive, often inspired by nature and traditional dance forms.

Instruments: Traditional instruments include the hulusi, elephant foot drum, and Mang Luó (铙锣), while modern adaptations include electronic instruments. **Singing Style:** Emphasis is placed on natural timbre and emotional expressiveness. Female singers (Ha Mei) often lead performances, engaging in call-and-response with the audience.

2. Discussion

2.1 The Historical Evolution of Water Festival Songs

The historical development of Water Festival songs reflects the dynamic interaction between cultural tradition, religious belief, and social change. Early forms of these songs were deeply rooted in agrarian and Theravāda Buddhist rituals. They played a central role in religious ceremonies, community celebrations, and seasonal transitions. This finding aligns with previous studies by Jiang Fangzhou and Dai Rui (2023), who emphasized the integration of Buddhist elements in Dai music, particularly in its function as a spiritual medium during festivals

Furthermore, the present study finds that as Dai culture engaged with neighboring regions such as Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, Water Festival songs absorbed external musical influences. This supports the perspective of scholars like Liu Yangwu (2006), who noted that Dai musical instruments and styles have historically shown adaptability and fusion with surrounding cultures. In recent decades, modernization and tourism have introduced structural and instrumental changes to Water Festival songs. Although new elements such as pop music and electronic instruments have been integrated, the core features of the songs—such as pentatonic modes and communal performance—remain intact. This balance between tradition and innovation demonstrates how Dai music evolves

while maintaining its identity, a point also observed by Cao Yunhua (2022), who explored development methods for Dai music in contemporary contexts

2.2 Discussion on Musical Characteristics

The analysis of Dai Water Festival songs reveals a complex yet coherent musical structure, based on traditional pentatonic scales, flexible rhythm, and call-and-response vocals. These musical features align with Jiang Ling's (2021) observation that Dai folk music emphasizes both simplicity and emotional depth through repeated melodic phrases and expressive singing styles

The current study also identifies modern performance practices that incorporate Western instruments such as electric keyboard and bass guitar. These developments mirror trends noted by Gong Bilin (2022), who analyzed how aesthetic transformations in Dai music reflect changing audience preferences and media environments

Compared with earlier research that focused on the symbolic and ritualistic functions of Dai folk songs, this dissertation provides a more detailed musical analysis of a representative piece, Ganbai Guilai. Through melodic analysis, instrumentation study, and performance context, this research adds new perspectives to the academic understanding of Water Festival music.

3. Suggestions

To ensure the preservation and continued development of Dai folk music within the Water Festival, the following recommendations are proposed:

1) **Strengthening inheritance and succession mechanisms** The local government and cultural institutions should establish programs that support traditional musicians through funding and recognition. Encourage the documentation and digital archiving of traditional Dai folk songs to ensure their preservation for future generations. Provide incentives for young musicians to learn and perform Dai folk music through scholarships and mentorship programs.

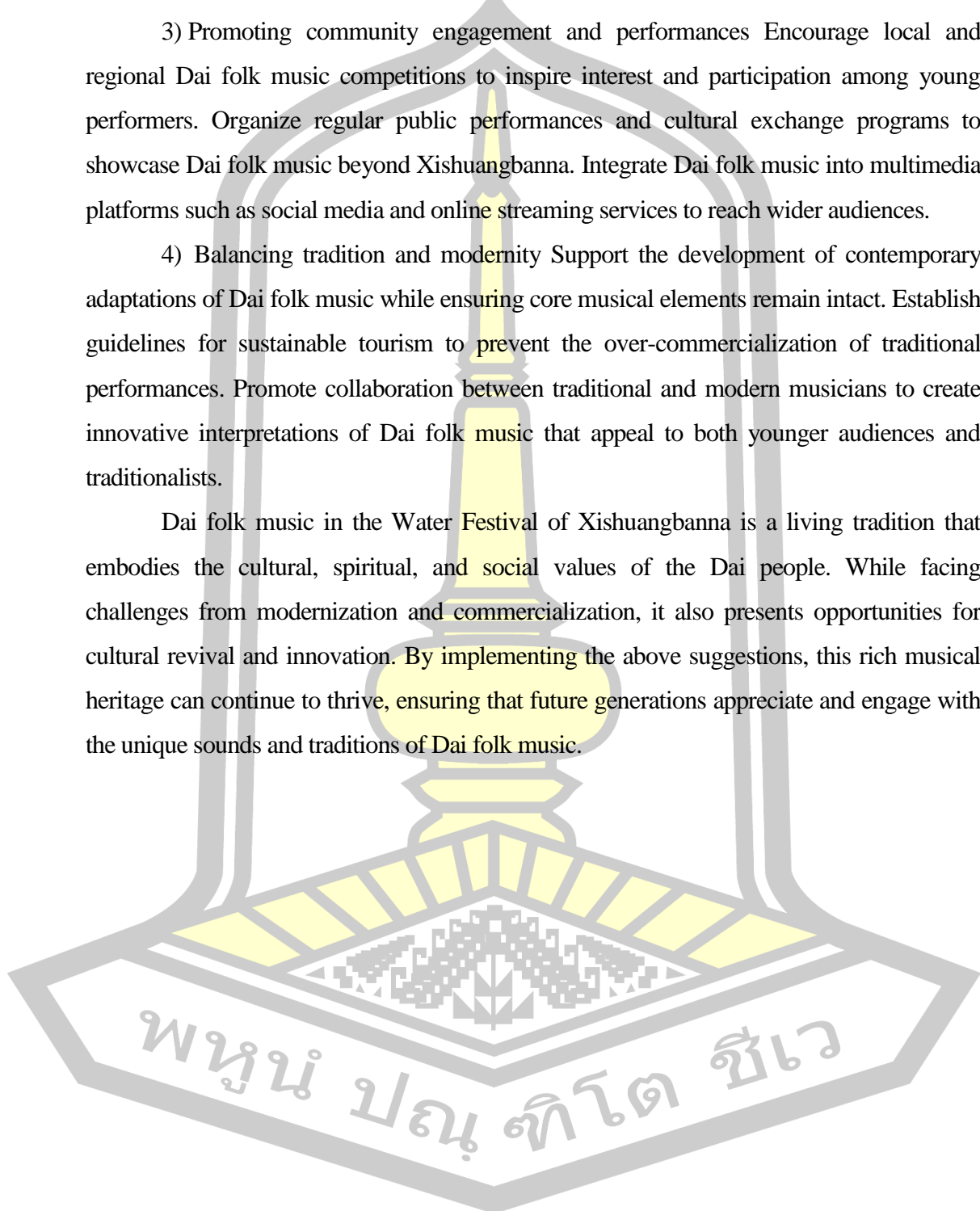
2) **Enhancing educational initiatives** Introduce Dai folk music courses in schools to engage younger generations in the tradition. Develop community-based music workshops where experienced artists can teach traditional singing and instrument-playing techniques.

Collaborate with universities and music conservatories to promote academic research on Dai folk music and performance practices.

3) Promoting community engagement and performances Encourage local and regional Dai folk music competitions to inspire interest and participation among young performers. Organize regular public performances and cultural exchange programs to showcase Dai folk music beyond Xishuangbanna. Integrate Dai folk music into multimedia platforms such as social media and online streaming services to reach wider audiences.

4) Balancing tradition and modernity Support the development of contemporary adaptations of Dai folk music while ensuring core musical elements remain intact. Establish guidelines for sustainable tourism to prevent the over-commercialization of traditional performances. Promote collaboration between traditional and modern musicians to create innovative interpretations of Dai folk music that appeal to both younger audiences and traditionalists.

Dai folk music in the Water Festival of Xishuangbanna is a living tradition that embodies the cultural, spiritual, and social values of the Dai people. While facing challenges from modernization and commercialization, it also presents opportunities for cultural revival and innovation. By implementing the above suggestions, this rich musical heritage can continue to thrive, ensuring that future generations appreciate and engage with the unique sounds and traditions of Dai folk music.



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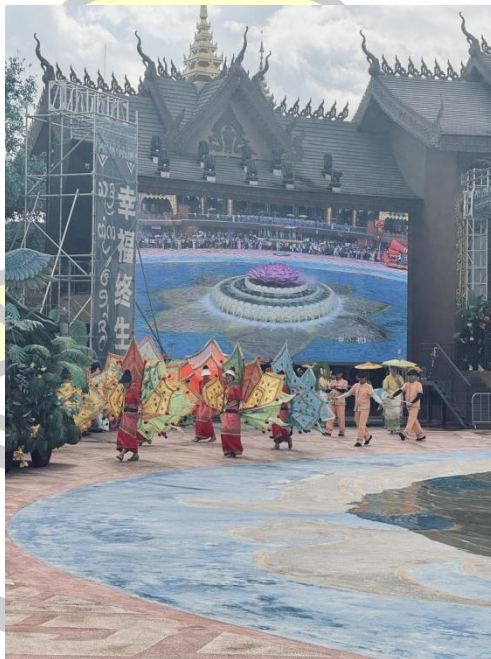
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APPENDIX

Appendix I Fieldwork Pictures



Picture 1 is the Dai Water Splashing Festival float parade



Picture 2 The Dai Water Splashing Festival parade dance



Picture 3 The participating in the Dai Water Splashing Festival parade



Picture 4 is the Dai Water Splashing Festival wild activities





Picture 5 An interview with a key informant

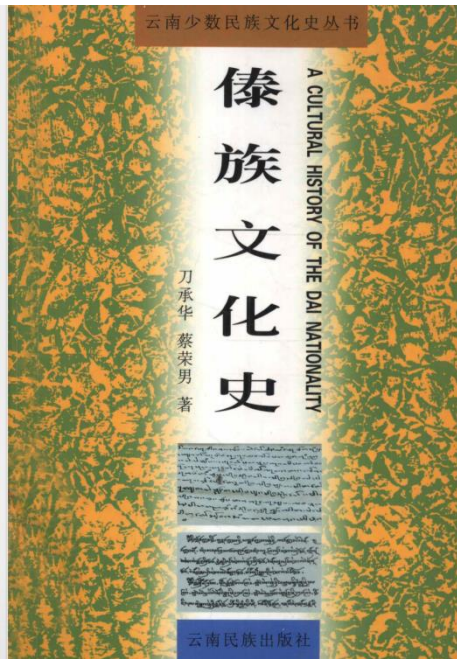


Picture 5 A photo with a key informant



Picture 6 A group photo of the main bands of the Dai Water Splashing Festival

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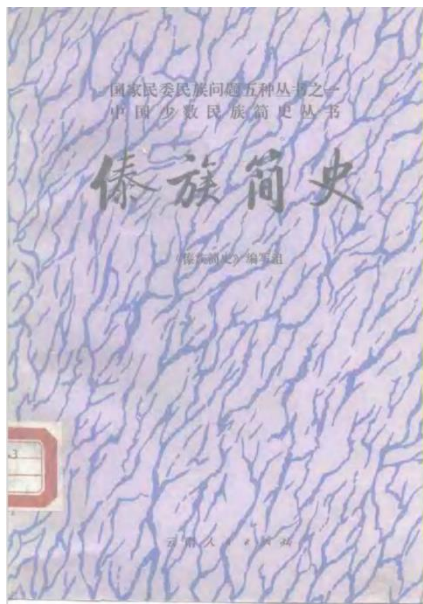
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Picture 1 A Dai culture book



国家民族问题五种丛书之一
中国少数民族简史丛书

傣族简史

《傣族简史》编写组



云南人民出版社
一九八五年·昆明

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Picture 2 A book on the brief history of the Dai people

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