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Music and Language in the Strophic Singing of the Zhuang Minority in Southern China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Ethnomusicology

by

John Widman

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Music and Language in the Strophic Singing of the Zhuang Minority in Southern China

by

John Widman

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Helen M. Rees, Chair

The Zhuang minority in Guangxi, China, are commonly celebrated for their “sea of songs.” While the epithet of being “good at singing and dancing” is an overused description applied to China’s fifty-five minorities, Zhuang do gather in parks during weekends and holidays and sing strophic songs outside their homes and on mountain tops to each other in annual festivals. Although a given geographic area typically features only one of these tunes, in many areas of Guangxi, these songs are the primary form of music-making. This kind of strophic singing, known throughout China as mountain songs (*shan’ge*), has a variety of names spread among the dialects of the eighteen million Tai-Kadai speakers who make up the Zhuang. The Zhuang who live along the Youjiang river valley call their traditional singing *fien*. However, the Zhuang do not typically refer to this kind of music as something that is sung, but rather something that is done. Youjiang Zhuang do (*gueg*) fun, business, travel, and *fien*. This linguistic sleight of hand indicates a significant difference in how a traditional Zhuang singer approaches music compared to most singers in Western societies. The primary way Zhuang evaluate *fien* is through the

quality of the lyrics. A good song is one that has witty lyrics, or words that reference critical parts of Zhuang culture. These words are often extemporized and must fit a specific rhyme scheme and phrase structure that correspond with major sections of the tune used to *gueg fien*. These features bring an excellent lens to examine relationships between music and language.

While music does not have organizational or meaningful equivalents to verbs, nouns, and adjectives, recent cognitive studies demonstrate that the same areas of the brain processing syntax and semantics are employed for both music and language (Patel 2003, Koelsch et al. 2004). However, many of the models reflecting these relationships have limited themselves to tonal music, especially from the West, and have not accounted for “the interplay of sound structure with the context and cultural assumptions of its creators/listeners” (Feld 1974:207). My dissertation begins to address these issues through positing that a combined analysis of language and music is possible in Zhuang singing. Specifically, I hypothesize that sections of melody and complete clauses of lyrics meet at consistent points in their respective structures, creating the possibility for a joint syntactic analysis of melody and lyrics. I further posit that Zhuang melody in this context has demonstrable semantic significance as an overt marker of a possible Zhuang literary world.

The dissertation of John Widman is approved.

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2019

This dissertation is dedicated to Huang Wenke, who kindly helped me take some of my first steps learning to perform traditional Zhuang songs. Huang passed away in the spring of 2019 during the writing of this dissertation. I hope that, in some small way, my writing can contribute to his memory.

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NOTES ON ZHUANG ROMANIZATION

Romanization of Zhuang terms in this dissertation is done in accordance with the Zhuang Pinyin used in the People’s Republic of China. Since there are several dialects of Zhuang, the spelling of these terms is based on a dictionary of Zhuang dialects published in 1998 (*Zhuangyu tongyongci yu fangyan daibiaodian cihui duizhao huibian*). I have organized the pronunciation of consonants, vowels, and linguistic tones into three tables below for reference. The consonants and vowels are given with their IPA equivalents. Also, it is important to note that markers of linguistic tones always follow the syllables and words they mark. In a similar manner, the use of the consonant-pairs b/p, d/t, and g/k, while each referencing the same respective consonant, denote different tones that are present in the words that take these consonants as a final.

Youjiang Zhuang Consonants

Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA
b, p	p	d, t	t	c	s
mb	mb	nd	nd	y	j
m	m	n	n	ʔy	ʔj
f	f	l	l	g, k	k
v	v (w)	s	ʃ	ng	ŋ
ʔv	ʔv (w)	z	te	gv	kv (kw)
				h	h

Youjiang Zhuang Vowels

Short Vowels				Long Vowels	
Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA	Pinyin	IPA
i-consonant*	ɪ	a-tone marker		e-consonant	e:
i-tone marker	i	ae-tone marker	əi	eu	e:u
iai	iai	ae-consonant	ə	a-consonant	a:
ia	ia	aeu	əu	ai	a:i
ie	ie	o-tone marker	o	au	a:u
iu	iu	oe	oə	o-consonant	o:
e-tone marker	e	u	u	oi	o:i
ê	ɛ	ua	ua		
êu	ɛu	ue	uə		
		w	ʋ		

*Applies to all consonants except -ng, where it is pronounced “i.”

Youjiang Zhuang Tones

Tone Markers for Open Syllables	Numeric Tone Value	Pitch Contour	Vowel Lengths and Closed syllables	Numeric Tone Value	Pitch Contour
unmarked	13	rising	short vowel with p, t, k	55	high level
z	31	falling	long vowel with p, t, k	45	high rising
j	45	high rising	short vowel with b, d, g	31	falling
x	44	mid-high level	long vowel with b, d, g	22	low level
q	35	mid-high rising			
h	33	middle level			

CHINESE GEOGRAPHIC TERMS

Chinese administrative divisions bring two main issues to the fore when considering geographic locations pertinent to this dissertation. First, place names below the prefecture/autonomous region administrative level often denote both a geographic region with further subdivisions and a specific urban center. Most city names in Guangxi represent both prefectural divisions and specific urban centers. With this in mind, when I use the term “Baise Prefecture,” I will be speaking of the larger administrative division; when I use the term “Baise,” I will only be referring to the city itself. A second aspect of Chinese administrative divisions is that units of equivalent size may still fall into different categories. Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is in the same size category as a province, but has a different relationship with the central government than a province. In a similar manner, districts and counties belong to the same size category (for example, Youjiang District is equivalent in terms of size category to Tianyang County). At the next level down, towns and townships are of the same size category but refer to rural (township) and urban (town) subdivisions. Because of additional complexities in Chinese administrative divisions, the list below represents those divisions that are relevant to this dissertation; the entries are not a comprehensive list. The list is presented in descending order of size category.

English Equivalent	Pinyin	Characters
Province	shěng	省
Autonomous Region	zìzhìqū	自治区
City	shì	市
Prefectural-Level City	dìjí shì	地级市
District	qū	区
County	xiàn	县
Town	zhèn	镇
Township	xiāng	乡
Village	cūn	村
Hamlet	tún	屯

SUPPLEMENTARY ONLINE MEDIA

The following videos are potentially useful for a basic understanding of how a performance of the traditional singing discussed in this dissertation sounds and of how some of my fieldwork was viewed by the Chinese and Zhuang public. The videos of singing are featured on the Chinese video site Youku. While these examples of singing are not a part of the data sample analyzed in this dissertation, the performances are very similar to the ones that I discuss. Accessing these videos may require downloading a viewer from Youku.¹ The footage of my fieldwork can be found in a documentary about three foreigners living in Guangxi produced by Guangxi Television and is accessible via an in-page video player on Guangxi TV's website.

“2009 Ganzhuang shan shan’ge 101” (Ganzhuang mountain shan’ge 101). 2009. mbaeqiqyanyanz Youku Channel, 28:59. Posted June 11. Accessed May 21, 2019. https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XOTc3NTU2MDA=.html?spm=a2h0k.11417342.soresults.dtitle.

“2019 Naba gexu 4(2)” (The 2019 Naba song fair 4(2)). 2019. 山歌制作人黄永龙 Youku Channel, 17:40. Posted May 16. Accessed May 21, 2019. https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNDE4MzYzODI1Mg==.html?spm=a2h0k.11417342.sresults.dtitle.

Guangxi wangluo guangbo dianshitai (Guangxi online television). 2018a. “Sanyue de zhaohuan (shangji) jilu 20180830” (The call of the third lunar month, first part, record 20180830). Accessed May 22, 2019. <https://vod.gxvtv.cn/video/51266.html>.

Guangxi wangluo guangbo dianshitai (Guangxi online television). 2018b. “Sanyue de zhaohuan (xiaji) jilu 20180906” (The call of the third lunar month, second part, record 20180906). Accessed May 22, 2019. <https://vod.gxvtv.cn/video/51401.html>.

¹ Any access of any electronic information mentioned in this dissertation or connected in any way to this dissertation is at the sole discretion of and is the sole responsibility of the person accessing that information. Electronic information includes, but is not limited to, any electronic data that can be obtained by accessing websites and webpages, downloading software and applications, and searching for and using VCDs. I assume no responsibility for any consequence of accessing any of the above-mentioned electronic information, including any damage to electronic devices, any introduction of malware to electronic devices, any data that is obtained through the process of accessing any electronic information mentioned in or tangential to this dissertation, or any further negative result that could occur from these and other potential scenarios.

GLOSSARY

closing/finishing iteration: an iteration that finishes a strophe of *fien*. This is distinct from a complete iteration because it only occurs after a string of incomplete iterations and not on its own.

complete clause: a linguistic constituent consisting of a verb with all of its argument positions filled. In certain situations, such as an answer to a question, the verb and argument positions can be considered to be completed by context. In this dissertation, I use the terms “utterance” and “sentence” as synonyms for a complete clause.

complete iteration: an iteration of strophic singing that does not require another iteration before or after it. This kind of iteration is equivalent to a strophe and occurs in *dangzvuengz* singing, *dige liao* song, and other musical forms, but not in the *fien* discussed in this dissertation.

dangzvuengz: a collection of traditional strophic epic songs named after one of the commonly featured stories, “The Tale of the Tang Emperor” (in Mandarin, *tanghuang* 唐皇).

dige liao: a kind of *liao* song beginning with the vocable *dige*.

fien: a traditional strophic singing style common to the Zhuang living along the Youjiang River basin in Guangxi, China. There is more than one geographic area that calls its traditional singing *fien*, but this dissertation focuses on the *fien* of the Zhuang living north of the Youjiang River in Youjiang District, Tianyang County, and Tiandong County in Baise Prefecture.

incomplete iteration: an iteration in a strophe of the *fien* discussed in this dissertation that must be followed by either another iteration of the same type, or a closing iteration.

iteration: a single repetition of a strophic melody.

kuaiban: a genre of rhymed rhythmic speech performed in conjunction with a bamboo clapper.

liao song: a Zhuang strophic singing genre similar to the *fien* discussed in this dissertation. This song style is named for the vocable *liao*, which is a prominent and consistent feature at the end of sections of lyrics.

line: an identifiable unit of lyrical content. In *fien*, a line is usually five syllables long, but can be as many as eleven syllables or as short as three syllables.

meet/join with: when used in reference to lyric and melody correlation, expresses consistent points where the tune and text align with each other.

melodic unit: in this dissertation, I use melodic unit to designate the smallest consistent musical constituent. Melodic units usually correspond with one lexical syllable and one ornamental vocable or with a structural vocable. However, it is also possible for a melodic unit to correspond with one lexical syllable when the ornamental vocable is omitted.

ornament: a unit of melody used as a decoration that can be removed without being considered an error.

ornamental vocable: a decorative vocable that can be removed without being considered an error.

phrase: a group of words that form a constituent structure of a larger phrase or clause.

strophe: in this dissertation, a strophe is the point where a group of lines (and in some cases, iterations), is considered complete. In Zhuang singing, this completeness is the point in antiphonal songs where another group can begin singing without their singing being considered an interruption. I also refer to a strophe as a complete utterance of *fien*.

structural vocable: a vocable that occurs at a significant point in the melodic structure and is either rarely omitted or omitted by mistake.

tune: an identifiable melodic frame synonymous with the melody of a strophic song, while acknowledging that this melody changes with repetition without an identifiable original form or variant.

vocable: a syllable with non-lexical meaning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2010, I traveled to China for the first time to study Zhuang music and Mandarin Chinese at Baise University. What started out as a simple excursion in fieldwork, funded by what I could earn in a summer as a wildland firefighter, has since expanded into a multi-year project that has challenged my understanding of what music is. While I still have much to learn about Zhuang culture, Zhuang singing, and the theories I have referenced in this dissertation, a number of people have helped me get to this point. I am very humbled and grateful for their help and would like to take this brief moment to thank some of them.

I have always been a guest in China and among the Zhuang and have been fortunate for the kindness shown to me during the course of my research. Baise University has always been a gracious host to me and my research, and I would not be where I am today without their support and the guidance of their faculty. In particular, I would like to thank my advisor at Baise University, Professor Qin Jindun, who has guided my study of Zhuang music and culture from my first time in China to the present. His excellent advice and clear explanations of his Zhuang culture and heritage have all helped inform my research. Professor Qin has introduced me to friends, family members, and colleagues, and he has also included me in celebrations for new homes, for weddings, for Chinese New Year, for the Qingming holiday (a holiday for cleaning one's ancestral grave), and in organized performances. I would additionally like to thank Professor Zhou Yanxian, who taught my first class on Zhuang language, introduced me to the liao songs of the Zhuang in Pingguo County, and involved me in some of the initial steps of a project translating *fien* into English.

I would also like to thank all of the Zhuang who have helped me learn their language and their traditional forms of music. Wei Guotie, a *maguhu* (a kind of bowed spike lute) player and

instrument maker, was one of my first contacts, and has been kind enough to make me a part of his life from the beginning of my research to the present. Luo Qisheng, Su Xiaoyong, Li Yingxiu, and Wang Zhongji have all been very hospitable, patient and helpful as they have explained the meanings of different words, expressions, and grammatical features. Su Xiaoyong has also introduced me to some of these teachers and has taken me into different communities to introduce me to singers and to help interview them. I am grateful to Huang Wenke for sharing his collection of lyrics with me and for the evenings he sat with me, helping me understand their meaning and singing through them with me. Huang Wenke was very welcoming to me every time I stopped by his stand in the marketplace. My first experience singing at a song fair was with Huang Wenke, and I had hoped to be able to join him again in the future. Ling Yurong, Huang Wenke, and Professor Qin were instrumental in explaining the meaning of song lyrics to me and for elaborating on vocabulary associated with singing. All of these people have generously invited me into their homes, given me meals, and introduced me to their friends and family members. Additionally, I would like to thank all of the people cited below in this dissertation, those who let me interview and converse with them about Zhuang music, and the singers who let me record them and invited me to sing with them. I am also grateful to Wu Xianglie and his crew from Guangxi Television for helping me to experience cultural tourism and modern expressions of folk culture in China.

My introduction to Baise University and the Zhuang was facilitated by Foresight Consulting. Mike Lane, who was the General Manager at Foresight when I first came to Baise, gave me a place to belong, reviewed all of my early writing about Zhuang music, and helped guide my first steps on this journey. Chip Bobbit, the current General Manager, has helped arrange my studies of Youjiang Zhuang and provided me with a place to stay during my travels. Shawn McKinnies,

the current Director of Cultural Appreciation and Preservation at Foresight, provided a method of studying Youjiang Zhuang and helped find language informants for all of my trips. I am grateful to all of these people and their families for their kindness and help throughout the years. In addition to Foresight, I am grateful to Peggy Milliken, who assisted with the evaluation of my language study in 2015. Peggy Milliken, Shawn McKinnies, and John Knightly have all been very helpful with their comments and expertise on the Zhuang language. Matthew Werstler, another ethnomusicologist studying Zhuang music, was generous with his sharing of information, and I hope that I was able to do the same for him.

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I wish to express my appreciation to my teachers at UCLA, the time they put into their classes and students, and their input into my outlook on my studies and life. I'd like to especially thank my advisor and dissertation chair, Helen Rees, for her encouragement and mentorship throughout my time at UCLA. My study of Zhuang music and this dissertation would not have been possible without her hours of kind assistance, chapter revisions, pertinent advice, and expertise on the music of China and its minorities. The members of my committee, Roger Savage, Münir Beken, Erica Cartmill, and Timothy Stowell, have all been extremely gracious with their time, have provided critical insight into the formation, research, and writing of this

dissertation, and have given me new approaches to the way I look at music. I would also like to thank Li Chi, the director of UCLA's Music of China Ensemble, for her invaluable contributions to my MA paper and for her *erhu*, *qin*, and ensemble instruction.

I would like to extend gratitude to my friends, colleagues, and family, who have empathized with my efforts and kept my spirits up. I am grateful to my parents for the upbringing I have had that has helped me get to this point. I have also been very glad to share this experience with my wife, Bingxin Chen, and would like to thank her for being with me, encouraging me, and accepting me throughout this process. Finally, I thank God for allowing me to experience his kindness through all of these people and their communities.

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<http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/journal/volume/17/piece/589>.
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- 2009 Substitute Teacher, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Soldotna, Alaska
- 2009 Band Director, Christian Liberty Academy, Aurora, Illinois

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Figure 1.1: A map of the geographic area where the research for this dissertation took place.



What does a melody mean when it is repeated over and over again for hours on end, but is neither part of a ritual nor a chant? What does a melody mean when it is used for different kinds of social occasions without any significant change? What does a melody mean when a new song is reflected by a change in lyrics, and not in the variation of scales, modes, or themes? These questions have run in and out of my mind since 2010, when I made my first visit with Professor Qin Jindun to a local village in Guangxi, China. We were traveling in Baise Prefecture, where I was a student at Baise University, moving away from the prefecture's namesake small city to the much narrower streets belonging to a small village in northwest Tiandong County, where a friend of Professor Qin's was celebrating his new house (see Figure 1.1). Both Professor Qin and his friend are ethnically Zhuang, members of a Tai-speaking conglomerate of 18 million people

dwelling mostly in Guangxi and southeast Yunnan.² As we arrived at the village, we were greeted by roaring waves of firecrackers. The smell of spent gunpowder hung in the air. We found a seat in a room packed with small wooden folding tables, each filled with bowls of different kinds of meat dishes, and some with steamed vegetables. After eating and toasting a couple of people at my table with a plastic cup filled with a brand of Chinese beer, Professor Qin brought a local singer over to the table to sing a song for me. When the singer presented a second song, and one or two more after that, I noticed the melody did not change, even though the songs were being presented to me as different. Several minutes later, the singer had a small competition with a group of female singers, with the loser being required to drink a cup of beer. The same melody was used again, but this time it was repeated as the singer added lyrics. Who lost was defined by who ran out of lyrics first.

During the early spring months of 2011, I would find out just how prominent the use of single melodies is in traditional Zhuang singing as I visited indigenous singing festivals scattered across different small towns around Baise. On a mountainside in Tiandong county, next to a cave where the ancestral goddess Yadai is venerated, local Zhuang sing for hours out of song books that have been passed down in written form for hundreds of years.³ In southern Tianyang county, I found myself sleeping above a room where Zhuang were singing the same tune back and forth between tables from late at night to early the following morning. During a warm and sunny May First holiday,⁴ several older Zhuang gathered in the main park in the center of Baise to sing.

² In Vietnam, the Zhuang and groups closely related to the Zhuang are known as the Nung and Tay minorities.

³ The Zhuang written script has been in existence since the Song Dynasty and uses many of the same characters as Mandarin Chinese and some characters that are made up of the same graphic components. Those characters that are taken directly from Mandarin are used either for similarities in pronunciation or for similarities in meaning (see Holm 2008).

⁴ The May First holiday is also known as Labor Day (劳动节 láodòng jié), which both a national and international celebration of the working class.

They clustered in groups singing song tunes from the places they lived in before moving to the city.

This way of doing music is very different from the way music is discussed in both the popular and academic spheres in the West. In Western pop culture, music is often portrayed as a universal language of emotions. This conception, though not entirely embraced by the academy, still finds life in the idea that musical meaning can be found in the tension and release in and between musical phrases. Zhuang singing challenges this metaphor because the traditional song tunes do not vary with changes with emotion or intensity in topic. In studies focused on music from cultures outside the West, primarily in the field of ethnomusicology, music is examined mostly in terms of social relationships. When musical form is discussed, it normally concerns genres exhibiting high levels of instrumental proficiency, large instrumental ensembles, or composition technique or type. Song tunes that repeat themselves, while noted, have not received much attention in terms of musical analysis, with the exception of a small corpus of recent studies. In contrast to both popular and academic conceptualizations of music, the singing of the Zhuang does not have the same transcendent value the West often places on music. Music in Zhuang culture is primarily judged by the quality of the lyrics. A song tune without Zhuang-language lyrics loses much of its meaning to a traditional singer.

This high value placed on lyrics in Zhuang singing provides a natural environment to examine what this genre can tell us about the relationship between music and language. Furthermore, the challenge of a lyric-centered strophic genre of music (where the melody is cycled as long as the singer wants to add new lyrics) suggests that melodic analysis alone might not be enough to properly assess the structure and meaning in this genre of music. In my dissertation, I begin to

address the issue of relating music and language through a strophic genre of music by evaluating a two-part hypothesis featuring a combined analysis of language and melody.

I hypothesize first that Zhuang singing joins music and language syntactically at the level of complete clauses. I test this first part of my hypothesis by examining a large number of repetitions in a song tune from a single geographic area to see if the melody and lyrics in Zhuang singing consistently meet in the same places relative to their respective phrase structures. A positive result justifies joining traditional melody and traditional lyrics into a single formal analysis of the syntax of Zhuang singing.

Second, I hypothesize that the function of melody joining the lyrics syntactically at the clause level serves as an audible marker of the “possible world” of Zhuang oral literature. “Possible worlds” is a concept borrowed from linguistic philosopher David Lewis (1986), and a central feature of intensional semantics.⁵ It helps account for how speakers and listeners distinguish fiction, guesses, beliefs, and perceived reality. In my dissertation, I test this portion of my hypothesis through evaluating metaphors, topics, and expressions used in Zhuang lyrics to see if they are consistently distinct from normal speech and other forms of literature. A positive result supports the claim that Zhuang strophic singing is an overt audible marker for a possible world of Zhuang oral literature.

This introductory chapter lays the groundwork for better understanding the Zhuang and the theoretical background for my hypothesis of Zhuang singing in three ways. First, I describe aspects of Zhuang history and culture relevant to this study. Second, I give a summary of the use of linguistic models in studying music, paying particular attention to those drawing from theories of Transformational Grammar set out by Noam Chomsky. Third, I provide an introduction to

⁵ In linguistics, intensional semantics concerns how parameters such as time, place, worlds, and contexts are evaluated and introduced into the meaning of sentences.

basic concepts of syntax and semantics, describing how the strophic singing of the Youjiang Zhuang relates to these concepts.

Zhuang Identity in Culture and History

The Zhuang are officially designated as the largest of China's 55 minorities. However, while this name reflects the fact that the Zhuang share some common cultural and linguistic traits, it can also cause some confusion, because there is more diversity between groups of Zhuang than the label implies. It is true that all the groups sharing the label "Zhuang" use a dialect of either central or northern branches of the Tai language and have traditions of wet-rice agriculture, animistic religious practices, and delayed-transfer marriage. However, some cultural elements that may apply to one group of Zhuang may not apply to others. Conversely, commonalities of Zhuang culture and music are often broad enough to include other ethnicities, even those outside the Tai-Kadai language family. These broad similarities and particular differences between groups of Zhuang create a good model for examining the Zhuang in relation to other groups of people in East and Southeast Asia. One of the clearest ways to illustrate the importance of this aspect of Zhuang culture is through the term "Zhuang" itself.

Zhuang Identity and Zhuang Self-Identification

"Zhuang" is an external label, first given by the Han Chinese as they progressively extended kingdoms and empires into Southeast Asia. This name was initially established during the Song dynasty (960-1279), when a group of people were first called *zhuangding* 撞丁, referring to a category of conscript soldiers used to subdue other minorities and defend the borders against the Vietnamese. While the Zhuang were also referred to as *dongding* 峒丁 or simply *dong* 峒 (*dong*

coming from the Chinese word for mountain valley), the more commonly used *zhuangding* became shortened to *zhuang* 撞 (Holm 2004:4-5). This character 撞, meaning “to bump into,” would also change to 獐 during the Ming and Qing dynasties. During this time, the Zhuang were controlled through the *tusi* form of indirect rule. Through the *tusi* system, native chieftains were appointed for different regions of southern areas. These chieftains could rule their area as they saw fit, as long as they stayed loyal to the current dynasty. While precursors to the *tusi* system existed even earlier than the Song dynasty, it was not officially codified until the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) (Took 2005). After the Nationalists took over China in 1925, the character representing the Zhuang changed from 獐 to 僮. The reason for this change was the difference between the radicals of the characters, with 亻 being the radical for person, and 犭 being the radical for dog. Although 僮 would seem to be a better choice, it can also be read as “slave.” Because of this possible interpretation, the Communist government changed the character representing the Zhuang to its current form 壮, which also means “strong.”

While the Zhuang have a single label given by the Han Chinese, different forms of self-address are used among different groups of Zhuang. Political scientist Katherine Kaup observes that the Zhuang living in Guangxi use over twenty names to identify their specific ethnicity (2000:41). Zhuang labels for people or groups of people start with the measure-word for person, *bu*. *Butu*, *Buyi*, and *Bunong* are all names Zhuang use to identify their people group. In my own studies of the Youjiang dialect of the Zhuang language, which follows the Youjiang River basin from Baise to the southeast through the centers of Tianyang and Tiandong counties, I have come across three of these names: *Bux mbanq*, *Bux gang mbanq*, and *Bux doj*. These translate to “person of the village,” “person who speaks the village language,” and “local person,”

respectively. In addition to having a variety of terms for self-address, it is important to note that names used for other ethnic groups and other groups of Zhuang outside a person's own dialect community are often derogatory.

That groups of Zhuang do not view other Zhuang as part of their own is unsurprising given the varieties of ethnonyms and the number of dialects in the Zhuang language. Zhuang is most commonly divided into 12 different dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible (Jin Li 2007:202). In Guangxi, it is common to make a distinction between northern and southern dialects of the Zhuang language as they correspond to the larger division of northern and central branches of Tai. These two branches have only 65% lexical similarity and have significant phonological differences (Luo Yongxian 2008). In addition to speakers of these larger language categories considering their branches mutually unintelligible, the officially promoted Wuming dialect (said to combine parts of these two branches) is also considered unintelligible with other dialects of Zhuang. During the past three years of studying the Youjiang dialect of Zhuang, I have found that the people I have learned from cannot understand much of what is spoken in the Wuming dialect and have always informed me that it is not their Zhuang.

Zhuang Commonalities and Differences in Music

This trend of broad similarities, seen in the label of Zhuang, and particular exceptions, seen in the differences in self-identification and significant language differences between groups of Zhuang, extends to many other areas of Zhuang culture and Zhuang music. This can be easily seen in one of the famous Zhuang instruments, the *maguhu*,⁶ which is a small, two-stringed,

⁶ I use the Mandarin Chinese term *maguhu* (马骨胡) here because many groups of Zhuang do not use this instrument. Consequently many Zhuang, including most Youjiang Zhuang, simply refer to it by its Mandarin name.



Figure 1.2:
The maguhu.
Photo by author,
6 October 2010.

bowed spike lute that uses a hollowed-out horse femur for a resonator (Figure 1.2). In both academic and popular literature, the *maguhu* is commonly referred to as a uniquely Zhuang instrument played in instrumental ensembles and Zhuang opera (Yang, Lu, He, and Ye 1989:288-298). However, despite this status, there are many Zhuang villages where the *maguhu* is not even heard of. In fact, there are many villages where Zhuang opera or instrumental genres are not a part of festive occasions either. As with terms used to define the Zhuang, historical references concerning Zhuang music follow this trend of commonalities broad enough to extend to other ethnicities and variations distinguishing groups of Zhuang.

Much of the written history concerning the Zhuang comes from the traveler reports and gazetteers written by the Han Chinese. While mentions of Zhuang musical practices are rare in both kinds of documents, certain forms did attract attention, especially those with religious significance, or those that were considered vulgar. For example, during the Warring States period (475-221 BCE), King Yichu of the Xu state claims that when poet and statesman Qu Yuan fled to an area north of Guangxi, he was inspired to write his famous nine songs. This inspiration came from observing “the commoners’ sacrificial rituals, the sound of the singing and dancing, and their vulgar and indecent lyrics” (Xu Songshi 2005:197). Tang poet Liu Yuxi (772–842 CE), after being sent to the Lang State on the southern border, observes that “Man [southern “barbarian”] commoners value the shaman. Every excessive spring sacrifice with drumming and dancing inevitably has songs with vulgar words” (ibid.). Finally, in the Guangxi gazetteer, written during the time of Ming dynasty Jiaqing Emperor (ruled 1521-1567 CE), one of the few examples of local singing is an observation of the use of singing to confront evil spirits (*Jiaqing*

Guangxi tongzhi). These two primary assumptions, of a religious element in traditional singing and of vulgar lyrics in song, have continued in different forms into the present.

The assumption of a close relationship between the origins of Zhuang singing events with religious ceremony is an example of a trait that is commonly attributed to all Zhuang, but may only be true for some groups of Zhuang. While much of Zhuang singing does occur at annual song fairs during the spring, the song fair commonly credited as being most like older Zhuang singing events is a religious-centered gathering in Donglan county. This song fair features the sounding of a bronze drum, an ancient instrument found in many locations with Zhuang populations and throughout Southeast Asia, and an animistic ritual where villagers search to find the frog who happens to be the thunder goddess's (or god's) daughter (or son) (Pan Qixu 1991). However, there are different legends behind the origin of song fairs, some of which have nothing to do with religion. Furthermore, even traditional singing by most Zhuang at the religiously oriented song fairs is not concerned with the deities who are worshiped. Despite the differences in the purposes of these major events, singing strophic songs to find a life partner or encounter with the opposite sex is a constant feature across these different singing events (Qin and Widman 2012). This would appear to indicate that the song gatherings have a degree of separation from the religious events. In a similar vein, Jeffery Barlow posits that the song fair might be a "functional response" to avoiding endogamy (2005), a suggestion upheld by Zhuang historian Jin Li (2007).

While song fairs that occur in present-day Guangxi are not all centered around religion, all of them do feature singing between male and female singers. In the past, song fairs were often a means for younger men and women to find life partners. This frequently included suggestive lyrics and even intercourse. However, this common trait of singing at annual events can be found

in other people groups throughout China and Southeast Asia. For example, Yang Mu mentions several ethnicities in China who sing at regular festivals and gatherings for the purpose of finding romantic partners (1998). Similar claims have been made of the Tai Dam in Vietnam (Lissoir 2015 and Lissoir and Demolin 2015) and the Kammu in Laos (Lundström and Tayanin 2010).⁷ Though not all song lyrics occurring in traditional Zhuang tunes are about finding a life partner or intimacy, as Han Chinese influence increased in Guangxi, traditional singing and song fairs were occasionally suppressed because they were considered to be vulgar. This climaxed during the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong, which lasted from 1966 to 1976. This tumultuous period was known for the mass suppression of traditional cultures in China. Zhuang singing was banned in Guangxi, along with similar genres throughout China, for being too salacious and for being a part of old culture, customs, habits, and ideas⁸ that allegedly needed to be left behind for China to move forward. While the freedom to sing traditional songs has been progressively restored since the early 1980s, many who discuss Zhuang singing still prefer to discuss the expression of love in Zhuang lyrics and singing in terms of affection, taking care to avoid the sensual (see Yang Mu 1998).

While the Han Chinese have commented on Zhuang music in their historical accounts, Zhuang history from the Zhuang perspective has commonly been expressed through music. Engravings in bronze drums and song lyrics passed on through forms of Zhuang writing provide some of the few pictures of what life may have looked like for the Zhuang of the past. However, these

⁷ The Kammu are a group of 800,000 Mon-Khmer speakers primarily residing in Laos, with some Kammu living in southeast Yunnan and northern Thailand. There are several alternate spellings of Kammu, including Khmu, Kmhm, Kemu, Khamu, Khomu, and Kmhm. In Chinese they are known as the *Kemuzu* 克木族.

⁸ Old Culture, Old Habits, Old Customs, and Old Ideas were also known as the “Four Olds” during the Cultural Revolution (Kraus 2012).

snapshots still need to be handled with caution, as they too reflect broader trends while being found in specific geographic areas with particular histories.

The oldest of these musical sources is the engravings on preserved bronze drums. Bronze drums, also called kettledrums, are found throughout southwest China and most of Southeast Asia. They are open-ended cast drums that have been unearthed at tombs in archeological digs for the better part of a century. While there are some places where these kinds of bronze drums are still sounded as part of traditional events (Holm 2003, Pan Qixu 1991, Luo Zhengfu and Xiao Tangjin 2017), most discussions of these drums fall in the domain of archeology. Here, the bronze drums bear silent witness to the dissemination of a form of music and visual art that can be traced back to 7th century BCE in Southeast Asia (Nguyễn 1987). Bronze drums come in different shapes, with a variety of ornamentation classified in systems derived from the categories of Austrian ethnologist Franz Heger. The patterns on these drums share a common design element of a tiered arrangement of stock repeating figures and/or shapes radiating from the center on the drum head, and vertically on the mantle. Some of the impressions on the bronze drums are of animals with likely religious significance, such as birds and frogs, and people wearing a tall, feathered headdress.⁹ On the drums, the headdress-wearing figures are often on boats, or appear to be dancing. These figures can occasionally be seen playing an instrument with the same shape as a *khen*,¹⁰ playing a drum, or holding a weapon. The different stances of these figures have naturally produced a number of different opinions regarding who these people are and what they are doing. Some believe the patterns on the drums indicate a people skilled at

⁹ These figures, shapes, and the patterns arranging them can be found in the research of A. J. Bernet Kempers (1988) and a recent publication by the Guangxi Museum of Nationalities cataloging illustrations of these symbols (CAABDR 2014).

¹⁰ The *khen* (also spelled *khaen*, *khene*, and *kaen*) is a free-reed mouth organ made from multiple vertical bamboo pipes (Miller 1985).

singing and dancing who have their own culture, religion, and rites, which indicate a cogent nation (Li and Zhang 2012). Others have made more specific observations of the impressions in the bronze drums of different kinds of courtship rituals, religious sacrifice, and martial activities (Jiang Tingyu 1999, Holm 2003, Nguyễn 1987, Barlow 2005). While it is difficult to say with complete certainty what events the drums represent, or what they were used for, these drums do demonstrate a cultural feature that was widespread among the Tai and Southeast Asian cultures who were capable of making these objects.

In contrast to the vagueness of the engravings on the bronze drums, Zhuang songs themselves provide a more detailed commentary on Zhuang history and customs. Lyrics contain information about political affairs, war, house building, and farming. Although many of these lyrics are associated with what can be found in written song booklets, the contents of these lyrics often make their way into improvised singing as well. Even the religious epic of the ancestral deity Buluotuo, which is often sung, has lyrics about house building, farming, and governing (Holm 2004, Han Jianquan 2012). Zhuang historian Jeffery Barlow's account of the taking of the Eight Stockades during the Ming dynasty in the mid-1400s by Zhuang mercenaries relies heavily on accounts passed down through written song booklets (Barlow 2005).¹¹ A recent translation of these booklets into English gives us a very clear picture of the taking of the stockades from the Zhuang point of view (Zhou and Lu 2012). The song lyrics cover all aspects of the fighting, from being drafted, to the journey to the eight stockades, to the fighting, and to the psychological impact on the soldier. The experience of being drafted is described in the following way (English translation reproduced verbatim):

¹¹ The Eight Stockades were a group of fortifications near the geographic center of Guangxi used by Yao or isolated Zhuang bandits as a base from which to conduct raids. Because of the security problem caused by the stockades and their inhabitants, multiple campaigns were carried out to successfully destroy them (Barlow 2005).

Male Singers: Last year my brother's drafted

It should be my turn this time

Not going I'd be punished

If going, I can hardly return (Xie Weifeng 2012:36)

As they move through the song book, the singers speak of rough and steep terrain on the journey to the stockades, and of food shortages. They sing of putting on armor, of climbing walls, of fatigue, of ways to die, and of dead soldiers. At the end, they sing of reuniting after the men return home. The lyrics in these songs, while written down, often vary between singers. For example, there are lines that are in Jeffery Barlow's singing examples that are not in the English translation of the above war epic. It is also possible that some of the lines in the English translation are not in Barlow's source material. The same can be said for song lyrics describing house building traditions in both casual singing and in singing the Buluotuo Epic (see Holm 2004, Han Jianquan 2012).

As with the external observations made by the Han Chinese, the records given by the Zhuang drum and lyrics in Zhuang singing are a combination of very localized parts of a general trend. The large bronze drums with their ornate detailing, while very common in Guangxi, are not a universal in Zhuang settlements. However, the use of metal and membrane percussion is a common feature among the different religious associations, known as *buxmo* or *dauhgong*.¹² While not every village has one of these religious associations, they are within traveling distance of most Zhuang villages. Likewise, while historical descriptions cannot be universally found in

¹² The *buxmo* (Mo) and *dauhgong* (Daoist) religious organizations consist of male priests who perform rituals for healing people, livestock, and crops; they also select auspicious days for life events such as funerals, weddings, and house-building. Their ceremonies often alternate between chanting from written texts, singing, and playing metal gongs as they interact with spirits of the deceased, spirits of animals, and ancestral deities. I refer to these two groups together because, with the coalescing of groups of religious practitioners in recent history in the areas in and around where I conducted my research, the same people often perform both *buxmo* and Daoist rituals (Holm 2004).

copies of Zhuang singing booklets, those lyrics are reflective of the historical experience of the Zhuang as one of the people groups the Chinese sought out for mercenaries. Lyrics that speak of broader cultural traits that have occurred across historical periods, such as house building, can be found in a wider variety of songs, and even on the bronze drums.

This pattern of broad similarities with critical distinctions extends to the topic of this dissertation, traditional Zhuang singing. Similar to the initial example with different forms of address above, the Chinese have labeled Zhuang traditional singing a kind of *shan 'ge* (mountain song). *Shan 'ge* traits typically include a very tight rhythmic and melodic frame that changes slightly with repetition, a priority of lyrics over melody, geographic tune association, and use in annual singing events and similar occasions for finding life partners. These characteristics are common to other people in China such as Han Chinese near Shanghai (Schimmelpenninck 1997) and the Kam minority in Guizhou Province (Ingram 2010), and to Tai-related groups in northern Laos and Vietnam (Lissoir 2015 and Lissoir and Demolin 2015). However, the name for this musical form, along with key features of how the song is performed, varies between groups of Zhuang. For example, a song form called *sei* finds its center in Debao County and features multiple groups of six to eight people singing a two-part song tune back and forth. In the northern half of Tianyang County, the Zhuang call their strophic song form *fien*. In this location, *fien* uses a single-part song tune sung between two groups of one to three people at song fairs, which can also be performed by solo singers. Furthermore, since language is the most important element in these songs, even song forms that are similar to *fien* and *sei* are not mutually interchangeable, since there are too many differences between dialects used in the lyrics.

Both the common elements and specific elements in Zhuang singing have affected the direction of this study. The elements shared with other strophic singing genres, the primary use

of a single, geographically oriented melodic frame, and especially the importance of lyrics, represent a valuable lens through which to re-examine the relationship between music and language. The differences between dialects and song forms are large enough that choosing a single song form is critical to this study. Accordingly, this dissertation focuses on the *fién* of the Youjiang Zhuang, who live in the northern parts of the Youjiang District, Tianyang County, and Tiandong County. While many of the major features of Zhuang song forms have important similarities, to analyze hundreds of repetitions for an accurate analysis is a difficult task for even a single song tune. Even song tunes with acknowledged geographic centers have variations that are found in more specific locations. Furthermore, since language is such an important element in singing, if the dialect difference is too wide, learning another Zhuang singing style would effectively require learning an additional language. This would indeed be the case if I were to study both the *fién* of the Youjiang Zhuang and the *sei* of the Zhuang in Debao. This further highlights the critical nature of language to Zhuang singing and its importance to the study of how music and language are related to each other.

Studying Commonalities between Music and Language

The similarities between music and language have prompted well-known scholars to designate this relationship as important to ethnomusicology. Jaap Kunst includes music and language as an area of research that he had not had space to discuss in his monograph on ethnomusicology, but still considers it important (1974). Alan Merriam, in his seminal work *The Anthropology of Music*, states that “it is a truism to say that music and language are interrelated and that the study of this interrelationship is thus a task for the joint energies of the ethnomusicologist and the linguist” (1964:187). This sentiment has continued in major works by

other ethnomusicologists such as Mantle Hood, who encouraged cooperation with linguists and talked about the importance of a detailed knowledge of “musical grammar” (1982), and Bruno Nettl, whose influential volume of essays on the field contains a good deal of linguistic comparison (2005).

Formal efforts at using linguistic concepts in the analysis of music find their starting point in the beginnings of ethnomusicology with a “short” paper by philologist Alexander J. Ellis. His analysis of pitch sets from around the world using a monochord and dividing the octave into cents led to the conclusion that “the Musical Scale is not one, not ‘natural,’ nor even founded necessarily on the laws of the constitution of musical sound, but very diverse, very artificial, and very capricious” (1885:526). Comparisons between music and language persisted in comparative musicology and ethnomusicology, with the bulk of formal analysis on this topic finding a hearing in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. During this time, many ethnomusicologists sought to analyze musical structure in ways that followed or resembled the goals of linguistic theories associated with Noam Chomsky (Henrotte 1988). Ethnomusicologists were moving beyond pitch sets and transcriptions to attempt to find the rules behind the generation of melodies. One of the most prominent of these was a system developed by Mieczyslaw Kolinski, which seeks to clarify “certain fundamental questions concerning the nature of tonal construction” (1964:241). This clarification is given through a scale formula marking “structural importance of tones and the steps by which they are connected” (Kolinski 1976:1), noting pitch difference and tempo, and graphing the melodic structure by pointing out reoccurring features. Kolinski was not an advocate of applying Chomskian grammatical principles to music, but his creation of a system showing the structural features of given melodies reflects other attempts at applying concepts of generative grammar to musical analysis. Publications by Vida Chenoweth

and Darlene Bee (1971) and Bjorn Lindblom and Johan Sundberg (1969), though approaching their subjects from the vantage point of linguistics, also feature diagrams illustrating interval preference and general melodic structure. While these methods focus on ascertaining the specifics of melodic progression, other efforts draw attention to musical styles that have specific codes associated with musical phrases (Boilés 1967); borrow parts of linguistic theory such as the concept of a deep structure driving the musical process (Blacking 1971, 1973); and experiment with flexible sets able to incorporate elements of music and culture (Herndon 1976).

This trend of applying linguistic theory to musical study gradually lost ground, for a few different reasons. In his essay “Linguistic Models in Ethnomusicology,” Steven Feld addresses shortcomings of analogies of music to language, including those made to transformational grammar.¹³ Feld’s criticisms of these systems are that many of them are too specific to the music-culture they are describing and do not come from a deductive framework, that many of them only focus on the sonic aspects of music and not on their connections with culture, and that linguistic analogies do not contribute anything new to ethnomusicological studies (1974). Many of these criticisms have been upheld by later surveys of literature concerning relationships between music and language such as those undertaken by Harold Powers (1980) and Feld and Fox (1994). However, these later writings also recognize “the real insights available to musicology from a knowledge of the study of languages” (Powers 1980:7). Feld and Fox even credit generative models of music based on linguistic syntax with stimulating “a reemergent psychomusicology focused on the cognitive bases of musical knowledge, understanding, and composition” (1994:30). However, linguistic applications in ethnomusicology are still seldom taught, and generally stay out of theses and dissertations, likely because of the overall trend away

¹³ Transformational grammar is a kind of generative grammar, which seeks to explain the rules of language that take the finite number of words in our lexicons to produce virtually infinite combinations of sentences.

from comparative musicology (Nettl 2005:61) and the level of additional expertise required for little apparent theoretical benefit (Nettl 1992:388). Many of the current discussions surrounding music and meaning revolve around semiotics (for examples, see Nattiez 1990 and Turino 2014).

Despite the currently sparse use of language metaphors in ethnomusicology, there are a few theories emerging from cooperation between music and language specialists that are still used in the present. In recent articles discussing and debating distinctly human elements of language, one point of mutual agreement is the usefulness of music in identifying language characteristics that are “shared mechanisms across different cognitive domains” (Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch 2002:1573 and Pinker and Jackendoff 2004). The agreement on the shared characteristics between music and language in these papers is based largely on Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff’s *Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (1983).

The Generative Theory of Tonal Music (GTTM) was proposed by Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff in 1983 and is still referenced by musicologists and linguists (Katz and Pesetsky 2009, Bigand, Lalittle, and Dowling 2009). GTTM takes a given piece of music and analyzes it through four primary lenses: grouping structure, metrical structure, time-span reduction, and prolongation reduction. Grouping structures and metrical structures represent basic ways that a listener organizes elements of “pitches, attack points, durations, dynamics, and timbres in a heard piece” (Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983:13) and how strong and weak beats are arranged (ibid.:17). Timespan reduction and prolongational reductions further organize these groups into headed, binary-branching structures. These means of analysis are first applied for the purpose of producing possible descriptions of structures to provide a set of well-formedness rules. The possible structures are then tested with experienced listeners and changed to match the expectations of these informants to generate preference rules. While this method draws its

inspiration from Chomskian linguistics, it is only in the sense that it seeks to “describe a (usually infinite) set by finite formal means” (Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983:6). The primary goal of this system of analysis is to map the intuitions of the listener.

However, GTTM has received very little attention and even a rather poor reception in ethnomusicology circles. In a review of GTTM, Feld sharply criticizes Lerdahl and Jackendoff for a largely Western-based theory based on too little theory and too much mechanics, proclaiming, “I am struck by how linear, taxonomic, visual, and atomistic this procedure is, how unempirical, yet how ready to proclaim great cognitive advances over earlier work” (1984:134). Furthermore, Feld observes that GTTM ignores “issues of enjoyment, involvement, or ways listeners relate socially, conceptually, or attention-wise to music,” and that “psychological dimensions of real-time temporal processing are equally removed, as are any historical, sociological, or ethnomusicological dimensions” (1984:134). Despite these criticisms, Feld does acknowledge that GTTM is useful for “enumerating musical orders and assigning descriptions to them” (1984:135) and, in a literature review with Aaron A. Fox, commends GTTM and similar efforts for drawing attention to understanding cognitive relationships between music and language (1994).

While these criticisms of the usefulness of this method for analyzing the variety of the world’s music and consideration of culture in analysis are similar to those leveled at Chomskian linguistics (see Levinson 2003, Millikan 2005), Feld’s initial criticisms are still very important to take into account with GTTM. For example, while Chomsky’s theories have been expanded and critiqued by application (or attempted application) to many of the world’s languages, GTTM has largely stayed in the domain of Western classical music from the 17th through 19th centuries. Why, in the 30 years of its existence, has GTTM not traveled beyond the West in a significant

way? This is likely because music in other cultures and places in the world does not have the same definition or function as it does in the West. Some cultures do not have a word for music. Other cultures do not prioritize tonal organization, such as some Native American communities, where, “from a Native singer’s (and dancer’s) standpoint, drumbeats are the musical focal point, and singing and dancing accompany the drum” (Browner 2009:xx-xxi). In a similar fashion, Zhuang singing places the greatest value on the quality of the lyrics and ability to extemporize words. Finally, music and its surrounding social environment are not always separated from each other in some cultures (see Merriam 1964 and Tenzer 2006).

Despite these valid criticisms, GTTM likely maintains its position in the scientific community because of the growing strength of studies demonstrating that music and language share cognitive resources and might be modeled in similar ways. While research in the 1990s pointed to a double dissociation¹⁴ between areas of the brain responsible for processing music and language (Peretz et al. 1994, Polster and Rose 1998, Poeppel 2001), this assertion began to change in the following decade. Aniruddh D. Patel observes that current analysis of music’s utilization of brain areas typically associated with linguistic syntax prompts a theoretical resolution to the apparent contradiction with the previous decade’s findings (2003). However, Patel’s assertion that current research “stand[s] in direct contrast to evidence from neuropsychology that linguistic and musical syntax can be dissociated” (2003:674) may not need a resolution. Studies cited by Patel cognitively disassociating music from language assume that loss of pitch perception is equivalent to the complete separation of music and language, or those who read them make equivalent assumptions (see Polster and Rose 1998). Furthermore, none of

¹⁴ Double dissociation refers to a situation when two areas of the brain are shown not to have influence over each other. In the studies listed above the researchers found that lesions affecting music perception did not have an effect on language perception and vice versa.

the studies referenced analyze musical systems outside Western culture or languages outside Western language groups. This lack of musical data from other cultures is problematic for cases where word perception is lost but music perception is not (Poehpel 2001), as there could be timbral and rhythmic factors interfering with speech comprehension that might also influence other styles of music in those cultures. Culturally biased flaws in these studies disassociating music and language are slowly coming to the surface as studies of amusia's effect on the ability to understand tonal languages and intonation suggest that cognitive loss of musical comprehension can extend to tonal aspects of language as well (see Nan Yun et al. 2010, Nguyen et al. 2009, and Liu Fang et al. 2010). This removal of Patel's obstacle strengthens the possibility of music and language utilizing the same cognitive resources for syntactic processing.

Recent cognitive research also suggests that music may also use similar processes when it comes to meaning and interpretation as speech. For example, a study of word association indicates that "both music and language can prime the meaning of a word, and that music can, as language, determine physiological indices of semantic processing" (Koelsch et al. 2004:302). In other words, a person exposed to the sentence "She is singing" is more likely to pick the word "music" out of a group of random words than if the person were exposed to a neutral stimulus or sentence with a different meaning. Likewise, a person exposed to a given musical passage is more likely to pick out words that reflect cultural metaphors associated with the music samples. Correlating the results of these word associations with activity in the brain, the researchers found that the subjects drew from the same areas of the brain to make these associations. While a response to these findings was circumspect, pointing out the broader nature of musical meaning and difference in structure, the authors did praise its "point that linguistic and musical meaning may have more in common than has been generally appreciated" (Slevc and Patel 2011:110).

The Relevance of Fien to Discussions of Music and Language

If music and language use the same cognitive resources for organization and meaning, then the study of fien and similar genres is especially useful for better understanding these relationships. The use of large amounts of text combined with the evaluation of song quality in terms of lyrical content creates a unique forum where we can ask questions such as, what role does the melody play in the syntactic formation of the lyrics, what meaning is added by the melody, and how do we model the combination of melodic and linguistic syntax and semantics?

In linguistics, syntax refers to the way that sentences and phrases are structured. For example, in the English sentence, “Ben eats pizza,” the subject, “Ben” is at the head of the sentence, followed by the verb “eats,” which is followed by the object “pizza.” This subject-verb-object (SVO) arrangement for active verbs is the standard form of English sentences. We can define this relationship by saying that a particular subject (D) and a verb (V) combine to make a sentence (TP).¹⁵ Since “eat” is a verb that can take a direct object, “pizza” joins with “eats” to form the verb phrase (VP) [eats pizza]. The resulting phrase, “Ben eats pizza,” could be further embedded into a larger sentence such as “I don’t like it when Ben eats pizza.” Significant to linguistic syntax is the ability of parts of speech and phrases to be interchangeable and for phrases to be able to maintain their form when they are embedded in larger sentences and phrases. This idea, that meaningful structures can be embedded into larger structures and still retain their meaning, is a central aspect of linguistic modeling. Indeed, the capability to have a system of communication allowing us to embed meaning inside meaning to a potentially infinite

¹⁵ D stands for determiner, which includes words such as “the,” “that,” and “this” that pick out particular nouns and names such as Ben. TP stands for tense phrase and is a common expression for a complete clause in syntactic analysis.

degree is seen by some as a uniquely human trait. This central tenet of recursion is also conjectured to be a part of musical syntax (Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch 2002).

However, the primary study for asserting the relationship between musical and linguistic structure, GTTM, has mostly sought structural rules that govern entire repertoires of tonal melodies. As Lerdahl and Jackendoff state, “in order to appreciate the poetic or dramatic structure of a poem in French, one must first understand the French language. Similarly, to appreciate a Beethoven quartet as art, one must understand the idiom of tonal music” (1983:7). This kind of assertion is problematic when dealing with the music of the Zhuang, where fifty iterations of fien are likely to show less variation than between any two musical works written by a Romantic composer in the West such as Beethoven. Even in Zhuang areas with multiple genres of music, each genre is essentially a different melodic frame as opposed to applying different sets of conventions to a variety of musical modes. It is possible that GTTM might still account for some of the variations in Zhuang melody; however, a greater depth of analysis is possible with the inclusion of language.

My hypothesis that each iteration of fien melody joins with a complete clause of lyrics is very similar to assertions made by Albert Lord in his seminal work on Yugoslavian epic singing. In his work on these songs, Lord observes a tendency for a certain number of syllables to be “followed by a syntactic pause” (1960:32). Lord later observes that “very rarely indeed does a thought hang in the air incomplete at the end of the line; usually we could place a period after each verse” (1960:54). In my research on fien, a syntactic pause is reflected either by the end of a cycle of the melodic frame, or through the insertion of vocables or a literal pause occurring in the middle of the melodic frame, usually after five syllables. These syntactic pauses mark not only the boundaries between groups of syllables, but also those between larger linguistic phrases.

Each of these “syntactic pauses” serves as the boundary for a line of lyrics that represents a complete clause. I illustrate one way this syntactic relationship could be modeled in Example 1, where Mel represents a section of the fien melody that joins with the sentence “this morning I went out of the house.”

1. Mel + [haet ni coiq ok lanz] This morning I went out of the house
morning this I went out house

2. Mel + [haet ni bux mbanq ni]* This morning those villagers¹⁶
morning this people (of) village these

Conversely, if we take Mel to be the same section of the fien melody for both Example 1 and Example 2, the latter would be considered ungrammatical (or an anomaly at best) because it contains an incomplete sentence.

In addition to the joining of sentences to iterations of fien melodies, the iterations could be seen as constituents that can be grouped into larger constituents. A single instance of fien, what a local Zhuang would call a song, is typically composed of multiple iterations of the song melody. This reflects musicologist John Roeder’s assertion that humans hear “shorter groups connected into larger ones, analogous to the way that one strings together successive gestures to play music or accomplish other tasks” (2011:13). While it is significant that Roeder’s assertion is similar to those made in GTTM, Roeder allows for the extension of grouping beyond single iterations of a melody to include other styles of strophic singing discussed in the edited volume he introduces (Levine and Nettl 2011).

Both Lord’s observation of a syntactic pause and Roeder’s assertion of a human tendency to apply grouping to strophic genres of music lay a firm foundation for my hypothesis. In a similar

¹⁶ Asterisks are used in linguistics to mark constructions considered by native speakers to be ungrammatical or not used in their language.

manner my study extends these ideas by seeking to formalize the music-language interface in a strophic song form. This goes beyond Lord, who primarily discusses the textual aspects of his formulaic theory (see Tokita 2015), and the work of Roeder and Tenzer, who primarily discuss musical aspects of grouping, to a combined analysis. This combined analysis gives us an opportunity to see how musical and linguistic organization might interact. Furthermore, examining a specific syntactic relationship between tune and lyrics gives us a narrower field to ask what meaning the song melody might bring to the text.

Semantics covers how we take sentences and phrases and “translate them into thoughts and ideas” (Carnie 2013:4). One prominent theory of semantics, drawing from the work of Gottlob Frege and Alfred Tarski, sees statements in language as providing true or false descriptions about the world around us and word categories as fitting together to produce these true and false statements. In this case, “pizza” is a place holder for an object in the real world, Ben is a placeholder for a person named Ben, and “eats” is a function, which is true if and only if variable x eats variable y. When we put these words together using the syntactic structure, we get a sentence that is true if and only if Ben likes pizza. In a similar manner to our discussion of syntax, this form of semantics explores how word categories retain their meaning in different phrase and sentence structures.

In examining the possible meanings in the syntactic correlation between the song melody and complete lyrical phrases (containing a subject and predicate), it is helpful to start with the semantics of other words that join with complete clauses. In linguistics, these positions are normally occupied by conjunctions or relative pronouns such as that, which, or who in the English language. However, the semantic functions of these kinds of words differ from how the melody functions in the field of the Youjiang Zhuang. Unlike relative pronouns, the lyrics in this

form of Zhuang singing do not necessarily modify an initial statement and might deviate from the immediate subject of the preceding set of lyrics. It is possible that the melody could be explained as a form of positive conjunction (and) linking all the lines in a given song. There are two problems with this possibility. First, a purely conjunctive role does not provide a satisfactory explanation for why the melody occurs parallel with the lyrics. Second, the melody and internal vocables are absent when lyrics are recited, with no need to reinsert a conjunction anywhere between the lines. These two problems indicate that the role of a conjunction does not explain the full melody. However, there is another linguistic feature connecting to complete clauses that gives a stronger candidate for a semantic explanation for Zhuang melody, possible worlds.

Possible worlds are a central part of intensional semantics, which uses the same ideas concerning embedded meaning discussed above, but helps account for how a sentence can still be true or false when talking about fiction, guesses, beliefs, and perceived reality. For example, in the sentence “John believes Ben left,” there are two ways to examine the truth of the statement depending on whether we focus on what John believes or what Ben actually did. Intensional semantics identifies the existence of these multiple perspectives and handles them by relativizing the content of John’s belief to a world that is unspoken, but implied by the word believe. This world is the world of John’s beliefs. A similar concept is employed when discussing fiction. In the statement “in the Sherlock Holmes stories, a detective lives at 221 Baker Street,” the location of the detective’s home is not true or false based on whether or not this has ever been the case in London; it is true relative to the written tradition based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s fiction. Relating these statements of belief and fiction together, linguistic philosopher Davis Lewis asserts that “storytelling is pretense. The storyteller purports to be telling the truth about matters whereof he has knowledge. He purports to be talking about characters who are known to him,

and whom he refers to, typically, by means of their ordinary proper names” (1978:40). Lewis further relates fiction to beliefs through demonstrating how we fill details of fiction with what we know of our own world in the present and beliefs about the literature itself, what Lewis calls “belief worlds of the community of origin” (1978:45). The acceptance and propagation of a work of fiction by a given community establishes precedent for later iterations of that fiction. As Lewis writes, there would be little point in an author writing a new story utilizing the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes “without inter-fictional carry-over” (ibid.).

There are some important similarities between the way possible worlds function in intensional semantics, and how the melody functions in fien. Structurally, both iterations of fien and statements concerning possible worlds must join to complete clauses containing a subject and predicate.

3. In the world of John’s beliefs apples*
4. In the Sherlock Holmes stories runs*
5. In the world of John’s beliefs apples fly

For example, sentences 3 and 4 above are structurally ungrammatical because the phrases connecting us to the worlds of John’s beliefs and the Sherlock Holmes stories are incomplete. Likewise, the primary sections of melody in fien have distinguishable forms and join with complete clauses. Clauses without a subject and predicate, unless implied through context, are almost universally considered ungrammatical.

Another structural similarity between possible worlds and fien melody is that the markers of worlds carry over to join with everything that is a part of that world. However, in most languages these markers are always covert. This can be seen in sentence 6 where the worlds are marked in parentheses where they join with the verb “fly” and the plural noun “apples.”

6. John believes apples (in the world of John's beliefs) fly (in the world of John's beliefs)

Even the statements opening the worlds typically leave the world as covert. We usually say "John believes," instead of "in the world of John's beliefs," and "In the Sherlock Holmes stories," not "in the world of Sherlock Holmes." Structurally, *fien* is similar in that it too occurs parallel to the sentence that joins to it, except that in the case of *fien*, the melody is overt and voiced. Like our previous examples, though, it is not only the structural similarities that are of concern, but also the functional similarities. Can we say that *fien* melodies mark a possible world, or even are the world itself? If so, what kind of possible world does it mark (or is it)? That *fien* song tunes might mark a kind of oral literature or are that oral literature is also a concept that can be found in the writings of Albert Lord. He asserts:

The song is the story of what someone did or what happened to some hero, but it is also the song itself expressed in verse. It is not just a story; it is not merely a tale divorced from its telling.

Sulejman Makic said that he could repeat a song that he had heard only once, provided that he heard it to the *gusle*. . . . This is a most significant clue. The story in the poet-singer's mind is a story in song. (1960:99)

As with the syntactic portion of my hypothesis, Lord's writings both provide a precedent and serve as a starting point to move forward from. If we are to explore *fien* in terms of being a world of oral literature, it is critical to examine what is meant by a world.

Questions concerning worlds and their makeup, arts and their relationship to worlds, and language and its relationship to worlds fall firmly in the domain of hermeneutics. A hermeneutical perspective on worlds is important in this discussion because of its emphasis on the roles humans play in what we perceive as the world, and with the creation of worlds. This

subtle shift in focus can be seen in the difference between Lewis' description of our world and descriptions by hermeneutical philosophers. Lewis views the world as follows:

Every stick and every stone you have ever seen is part of it. And so are you and I. And so are the planet Earth, the solar system, the entire Milky Way, the remote galaxies we see through telescopes, and (if there are such things) all the bits of empty space between the stars and galaxies. There is nothing so far away from us as not to be part of our world. (1986:1)

For hermeneuticist Paul Ricoeur, a world is "something that surrounds me, that can submerge me; in any case, it is something I do not produce but in which I find myself" (1998:29). The shade of meaning added by Ricoeur is the situating of the world to the beholder's experience. This is related to Martin Heidegger's *dasein* (being in the world understandingly) and the idea that the world manifests itself to us not by cold objects, but by objects that are of interest to us as humans, what Heidegger calls a state of being that is "present at hand" (1962). Hans Georg Gadamer observes that we increase our awareness of what is or could be present at hand through language and through linguistically formed tradition, asserting that "in language the world itself presents itself" (2004:450). This reflects Gadamer's view that the world is something that is humanly structured as opposed to the environment, which belongs to all living beings. The perspective that worlds are presented in the expression of human orientations toward the world, such as through language, allows for a conception of music and literature as play, because we not only enter worlds as members of particular cultures, but also have an active role in their construction.

Again, this is not far removed from Lord, who views his work as elaborating on "the preservation of tradition by the constant re-creation of it" (1960:29) and provides a compelling account of what it is to perform narrative in Yugoslavia. However, Lord focuses most of his attention on the creativity of performers in the performance and reperformance of the content of

narrative. As Japanese music and folklore scholar Alison McQueen Tokita observes, “the musical element, although an integral part of the narrative, receives little attention in the influential structural model that they created” (2015:10). In my dissertation, I am interested not only in how worlds are formed in the text of fien, but also in how these worlds are presented in melody. I am interested not only in how the worlds are changed in performance, but also in how they are inhabited by the listeners, who might listen to versions of fien in fixed formats. Finally, I also explore fien in the context of other text and melody combinations to explore the boundaries of worlds and differences in how other musical worlds might be structured and lived in.

Fieldwork and Data Collection

I began my research of Zhuang music through studying at Baise University for three years, beginning in the fall of 2010 and ending in the spring of 2013. Since that time, I have made one trip to visit a singing fair in 2014 and have made three summer trips in 2014, 2015, and 2016 to study the Youjiang Zhuang language, each time with funding from a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship. During the 2015-2016 school year, my advisor from Baise University Professor Qin Jindun, came to UCLA as a visiting scholar. In addition to other academic activities, Professor Qin helped me study Zhuang grammar and song lyrics. My most recent trip to Baise to collect data for this dissertation lasted from September 2017 to September 2018. This trip was also funded by a FLAS fellowship, and my research in Guangxi was locally supervised by Qin Jindun with the cooperation of Baise University.

The data for this project has been collected in four ways. The first was through collecting fien as it occurs across a variety of demographics of the Youjiang Zhuang in northern Youjiang District, Tianyang, and Tiandong. Over the past year in Baise, Guangxi, I collected

approximately 30 hours of recordings of this melody through VCD sellers, field recordings taken at annual singing festivals, recordings from local singers, and videos that have been passed around through social media. The second was through regular classes with Tianyang Zhuang speakers Wang Zhongji and Ling Yurong, and with the Chair of the Arts Department at Baise University, Qin Jindun. I used these meetings to learn and study the vocabulary and grammar used in conversation, in fien, and in other kinds of performance using the Youjiang Zhuang language. The third method has been through ethnographic interviews and informal conversations with singers, academics, and younger Zhuang, who no longer practice traditional forms of music making. While I began with formal, recorded interviews, as my research progressed, and I met regularly with key informants, I switched to repeated conversations where I could ask questions in different ways without having the pressure given to my informants by a recorder. The fourth method has been through direct participation in the music at the park and at song fairs. This was a departure from my original research plan. I had initially planned on spending the majority of my time at song fairs recording singers. However, after a recording of one of my own singing attempts went viral, I was invited to sing along with some of the participants at the song fairs I visited. I recorded these interactions and include them in my research. In all performances and interviews in non-public contexts, I have sought oral permission before recording. Furthermore, I have asked permission to use quotations from material I have written down from interviews or recorded in public, un-staged settings.

Dissertation Chapters

My analysis of the structural relationship between song tune and lyrics in fien and how this relationship implies a possible world of Zhuang oral literature is divided into the following chapters.

In chapter two, I give a thorough discussion of strophic singing as it occurs among the different groups of Zhuang and how this is related to other styles of strophic singing in China and Southeast Asia. I also examine the relationship between Zhuang songs and other kinds of Zhuang music making that can be found in Guangxi. Finally, I examine the fien of the Youjiang Zhuang and how it relates to the strophic singing of other Zhuang groups, and its interaction with other kinds of traditional music that can be found in Baise Prefecture.

Chapter three closely examines different correlations between fien and the language of the Youjiang Zhuang. This examination includes both small structural features—such as the relationship between sections of the melody and language tones, vowels, and vocabulary—and large structural features, such as how language correlates with the melody at the level of a complete sentence. The data set for this chapter includes recordings of fien from locally sold DVDs, from field recordings of singing festivals, and from my own attempts to find the boundaries of song melody and lyric function through learning to sing.

In chapter four, I focus on the relevance of the correlation between the melody and lyrics of fien through an exploration of the make-up of the oral literature of the Youjiang Zhuang as it occurs in fien. I examine this literature for consistent themes and formulas that show a cogent body of lyrics. I expand the data used in the previous section to include written collections of Zhuang lyrics. Furthermore, I compare these findings with the lyrics that exist in other musical genres that are familiar to traditional singers. Finally, I address a claim that has been common

among the Zhuang I have interacted with—that anything can be sung in fien—since this statement brings a potential challenge to my assertion that melody in fien denotes a world of literature that is distinct from conversation and other bodies of Zhuang literature.

In chapter five, I focus on how the Youjiang Zhuang view fien, relying heavily on my interviews with traditional singers, and with other local Zhuang who have grown up around fien. I address questions of what makes a good song, how the Zhuang perceive melody, what makes good lyrics, and what vocabulary is used to describe the music. In this chapter I am most interested in writing about the lives of the singers as they relate to traditional singing, their perspectives on the process of singing, and about how they have learned and transmitted fien.

In chapter six, I cover social change and the relationship of Zhuang singing to the intangible cultural heritage movement in China. I discuss the importance of musical form as it relates to the nature of traditional Zhuang singing and current pop and globalized styles of music. There has been a growing number of ethnic Zhuang popular music ensembles and Zhuang language pop-songs, which sometimes feature melodies borrowed from different genres of traditional singing. I analyze these new forms along with other changes to Zhuang music culture, paying special attention to how staged music performances contrast with the structure and characteristics of more traditional song fairs.

Chapter seven concludes this dissertation with a summary of the findings of my field research and analysis and seeks to apply these findings to current research on the different topics discussed in each chapter. Specifically, I explore what this exploration of the fien of the Youjiang Zhuang can contribute to future studies of strophic singing and to studies of relationships between music and language. I also suggest ways this dissertation can be expanded

and tested further in the future. Finally, I conjecture what the Zhuang might think about my methods and the results of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALIZING FIEN

In the introduction to this dissertation, there were four major components of fien that were mentioned: a tight rhythmic and melodic frame that changes slightly with repetition, a priority of lyrics over melody, geographic tune association, and use in annual singing events, usually for finding life partners. These traits in traditional singing were acknowledged as shared not only by other groups of Zhuang, but also by other ethnicities in China and Southeast Asia. This includes both peoples that are a part of the larger Tai language family and a number of groups from other linguistic families.

Because genres sharing these four features found in fien can be observed across a wide geographic, linguistic, and ethnic range, a number of scholars have commented on different aspects of this kind of singing. Large anthologies of melodies, such as the multi-volume anthology of Chinese folk music (see Jones 2003) and Fan Ximu's compilation of one hundred Zhuang folksongs (2009), demonstrate the narrowness of the melodic changes present in song tunes, since the few transcriptions representing each example are typically enough to identify the melodies represented in the field (see Widman 2014). That entire works have been devoted to song lyrics of shan'ge and similar genres (e.g. Yasushi and Santangelo 2011, Zhou and Lu 2012, and Lundström and Tayanin 2006) illustrates the critical role of lyrics in these genres of singing. The association of tunes with geographic centers, while not the topic of any individual works, is a central theme in Antoinet Schimmelpenninck's landmark study of the shan'ge in southern Jiangsu (1997). Song fairs have not only received attention among studies of Zhuang music culture (Pan Qixu 1991, Bai Xue 2015, Ping Feng 2017), but have also been a key component in Yang Mu's discussion of erotic music across several ethnic groups in China (1998).

Observations of these key features in the strophic singing of China and Southeast Asia are important for further definition of the workings of these traits, in how they are discussed by academics, and for ascertaining how these traits vary. Examining how scholars with differing academic foci have interacted with these features will help us better understand how they are present in the field of the Youjiang Zhuang. In this chapter, I divide the discussion of these core aspects of strophic singing geographically in three ways: first, through an examination of how widespread these characteristics are and how they manifest themselves among different Chinese and Southeast Asian ethnic groups; second, through looking at how the shan'ge of the Zhuang is handled by scholars; and third, by contextualizing the field of the Youjiang Zhuang in its geographic and musical environment.

Shan'ge and Similar Styles of Strophic Singing in China and Southeast Asia

It is not always possible to determine if a given genre of music in East or Southeast Asia contains all four traits that are common to Zhuang strophic singing from a single piece of academic literature. Much of this has to do with the attitudes that have prevailed in the academic literature covering these genres of music. Fascination with musical forms has typically been reserved for kinds of music that have large ensembles, varieties of musical themes, and patterns created by combining musical expressions from different instruments. Published work detailing the intricacies of repeated melodies are few and far between, with Brăiloiu's writings on Rumanian folk tunes (1984), Schimmelpenninck's 1997 groundbreaking study of shan'ge, and a recent dissertation by Gloria Wong (2009) being notable exceptions. This lack of attention given to the musical features of these song forms has likely contributed to the fact that very little has been done to study their geographic distribution in detail. Studies of lyrics and the discussion of

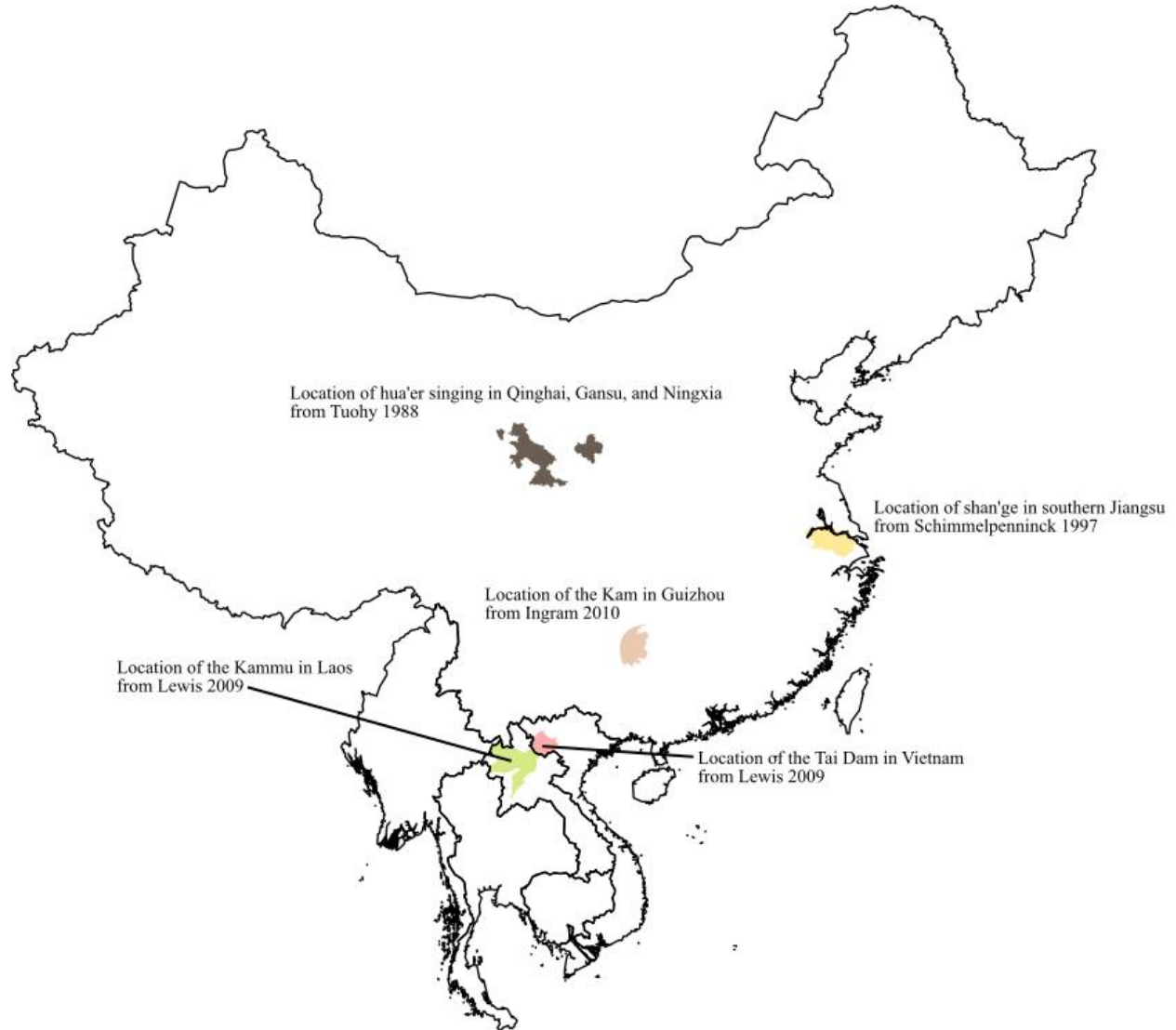
the roles they play have typically been left to the fields of folklore and linguistics. Musical studies relating to lyrics have generally sought to show how phonological properties of words interface with song melodies. Singing events pose a similar issue, since a scholar researching festivals might focus on singing fairs without giving much attention to musical issues, and a researcher examining the music might give less attention to song fairs. Oppressive historical events such as China's Cultural Revolution and major changes in lifestyles have also reduced the number of places holding traditional musical events, meaning that, for some scholars, these events are no longer part of current musical practice. Finally, since there is no standardized way of identifying these genres, and since there is a bountiful quantity of theoretical frames and social issues that can be addressed through these songs, any one of these characteristics might be included, left out, focused on, or minimized depending on what is being discussed.

Another factor in determining the spread of these characteristics is the number of ethnic groups in China and mainland Southeast Asia. While China officially recognizes fifty-five minorities, many of these groups can be subdivided into smaller ethnic identities. Southeast Asia is also home to a large number of different cultures that are certainly more complex than official ethnic labels indicate.¹⁷ Because of the scope of this dissertation, it would take too much space to evaluate every group in this geographic range to determine if they have genres of music sharing these characteristics that belong to them. However, through a brief look at studies that have been conducted at different points in this region (see the map in Figure 2.1), we can demonstrate that these characteristics are not limited to the Zhuang, to Tai-speaking minorities, or even to

¹⁷ In China, the complication of ethnic diversity beyond official classification can be seen in the over four hundred different responses to the question of ethnic identity in the PRC's first census (Mullaney 2011). The existence of this disparity between officially acknowledged and existing ethnic groups in mainland Southeast Asia is evident in Jean Michaud's observation that "the possible number of distinct ethnic identities in the highlands can be over a thousand when taking into account the array of local names and language variations within each group" (2006:2).

Southeast Asia. The key components of fien represent a widespread and well-established musical form.

Figure 2.1: Map showing locations of strophic song genres to be discussed in this chapter.¹⁸



A Tight Rhythmic and Melodic Frame Varying with Repetition

In her groundbreaking work on shan'ge in Wu dialect areas in southern Jiangsu, Antoinet Schimmelpenninck defines a tune not as a single melody, but as “a basic melodic framework

¹⁸ Three of the areas for this map were made based on descriptions of the studies cited. For mainland Southeast Asia, however, the areas of the ethnic groups in question were taken from language maps in the Summer Institute of Linguistics' *Ethnologue*, an annual print and online publication featuring statistics and mapping of the living languages of the world (Lewis 2009).

subject to variations” (1997:227). Elaborating on this concept, Schimmelpenninck adds that if one were to travel among Wu dialect speakers for a few days asking people to “sing whatever they like,” it would result in “hundreds of repeated verses of one identifiable tune, sung by many different performers” (ibid.). When only one or two of these melodic frames dominate a given area, it is a phenomenon Schimmelpenninck calls monothematism. Far from being an isolated way of doing music, Schimmelpenninck asserts that “the art of variation (within a set and limited repertoire of tunes) is, in fact, so much at the core of all Chinese music that it must be regarded as a key issue in Chinese music research” (1997:224). A similar set of claims can be seen in Catherine Ingram’s description of the Kam term used for traditional melodic forms, *sor*:

[Sor’s] use was central to understanding the melodic forms of Kam songs, as songs in all but one of the many song genres or categories of genres employed the same *sor*. It would be somewhat misleading to assume that *sor* were conceptualized as set melodies that were varied for each set of lyrics, since melodies were not perceived as entities deriving from a single static, unchanging form. I suggest that *sor* were perceived as a “melodic habitus” that loosely defined the melodic choices possible for all songs sharing the same *sor*. (2010:92)

Like Schimmelpenninck, Ingram points out the widespread nature of this kind of musical phenomenon in Chinese music (2012). Extending into northwest China, Sue Tuohy observes that the melodies of the *Taomin hua’er*¹⁹ songs in west Gansu province “are said to be more stable than the verbal texts; for instance, people say that there is only one Lianhua Mountain melody. In this sense, what they mean is a skeleton or core melody” (1988:154). Traveling south from Guangxi into Laos, there are also different ethnic groups singing songs with similar musical forms. Linguists Marie-Pierre Lissior and Didier Demolin describe the *khap* singing of the Tai Dam in a very similar way to Tuohy, noting that it is “based on a certain number of melodic

¹⁹ Hua’er songs are frequently referred to as a kind of shan’ge. Taomin is a combination of two place names from the Tang Dynasty (Taozhou and Minzhou) where this kind of *hua’er* could be found (Tuohy 151n39).

models . . . a kind of basic skeleton underlying the structure of the song, and which serves as a frame for the singer” (2015). Håkan Lundström and Damrong Tayanin’s book on Kammu songs asserts that all vocal genres are “built on one basic melody or tune that is varied according to the words of the *trnəəm*²⁰ in question” (2006:13). Lundström and Tayanin use the term “mono-melodic” to describe this process, a word similar in form and meaning to Schimmelpenninck’s monothematism.

As evident in these examples, there are a number of terms that have been generated by this musical phenomenon, a fact that is acknowledged by Ingram, who notes that “scholars have not analyzed this in a single way, or used consistent terminology” (2012:71). In this set of examples, we have the following terms: melodic framework, melodic habitus, skeleton, core melody, mono-melodic, and monothematism. While this list is by no means as large as Kofi Agawu’s list of terms used to describe African rhythmic practices (2003:71-72), there are other symptoms reflecting Agawu’s critique of the variety of views among Western scholars. These include different ways of transcribing and analyzing this phenomenon (as observed by Ingram), and even whether or not it is included in academic scholarship in the first place.

Before we relegate these differences in terminology to the status of “enduring myths,” though, it is imperative to acknowledge that they reflect issues of explaining these concepts to an audience used to thinking of melodies (and even the non-technical usage of “tune”) as singular and virtually exact entities. Faced with these pre-understandings, Lundström observes that “even a simple term like ‘song’ is problematic. One reason for this is that in the study of orally transmitted singing the concept ‘song’ has been closely associated with the concepts ‘original’

²⁰ The Kammu term *trnəəm* can translate roughly to “song,” or to “orally transmitted poetry” (see Lundström 2010:16).

and ‘variant’” (Lundström 2010:15).²¹ Indeed, it is this same reasoning that inspires Ingram’s use of “melodic habitus,” and Schimmelpenninck’s need to define tune and melody in terms of a melodic framework where “the variants are all we have” (1997:226). Another explanation for the diversity of terms is that there are variations in melodic characteristics, timbre, and cultural backgrounds in the performances of these songs. Groups of singers might range from a single person in some genres to several people in the case of the big song of the Kam. Songs might be multipart, melismatic, or have a very narrow range of pitches for the entire melody. Studying song terms across larger areas can result in different singing practices and variations of practice sharing the same name. Surveying *hua’er* song genres across four provinces, Tuohy notes that “today the *hua’er* area is indeed wide and diverse, a fact that makes defining and classifying the songs and performances difficult” (1988:150). However, despite these differences in practice and terminology, the widespread observation of tunes that are made entirely of variants is an important starting place when looking for commonalities between genres.²²

The Priority of Lyrics Over Melody

Prioritizing lyrics over melody does not mean that melody is unimportant or that it is not evaluated at all. A melody that strays too far from the frame that is created by the variations making up a strophic tune will not be recognized as belonging to its area of origin. A poorly ornamented tune, or a tune that is sung with an undesirable timbre, will often detract a good deal from the quality of a performance. Rather, claiming the priority of lyrics over melody is an

²¹ This is not to say that all studies of variants have had the finding of an original tune as the primary object. For example, Charles Seeger’s analysis of the “Barbara Allen” tune acknowledges that none of the variants studied could be considered *the* tune, especially due to the tendency of song tunes to change in performance (1977b:316).

²² Other genres of music in China, such as opera, also show similar traits to these kinds of tunes in their music (e.g. Yung 1989).

acknowledgement that the primary locus of creativity is in the text. A singer, for the most part, is not trying to produce new ways to put notes together, but to create desirable words. The shan'ge singers examined by Schimmelpenninck “indirectly acknowledge the dominance of poetry over music in their own tradition by defining a ‘good singer’ as one who ‘carries many texts in his belly.’ Their true pride is in the words, and the tunes basically serve merely as vehicles to carry the lyrics” (1997:302). Ingram strengthens this assertion in her work among the Kam, where she finds that “older generations of Kam people usually based aesthetic judgments of songs or song repertoires (including big song) on the quality of the lyrics—not the melody, or even in many cases, the manner in which the song was performed” (2010:102). In a similar manner, Tuohy discusses how singers of *Taomin hua'er* “compete in words with one another,” observing that “the words should be tied to the subject of the verse of the opposing group. If the verse is not good, the singers are mocked or criticized. If the singers are particularly good, listeners give them money, food, gifts, and red cloths” (1988:152-153). While Lundström does not refer to Kammu singing in the same way as the first three examples, it is significant that he chooses the term “vocal genre” for his definition of Kammu singing (2010:15). Additionally, Lundström, Tayanin, and Kammu scholar Frank Proshan (1992) devote much of their writing to discussing topics pertaining to song lyrics. Lissoir does not emphasize the importance of lyrics to the same degree as Schimmelpenninck, Ingram, and Tuohy in her reflections on Tai Dam song culture. However, this can still be seen in her inclusion of a “continuous flow of words,” “creativity and capacity of improvisation,”²³ and “using metaphors and rhymes” in her list of aesthetic criteria of Tai Dam singing (2015:76).

²³ Since Lissoir refers to the use of a single song tune in Tai Dam music, it is likely that her reference to creativity and improvisation concerns the production of lyrics.

While the importance of lyrics can be seen in the discourse of these studies, there are a few notable differences in the way they are examined. This could again be attributed to the inherent variety of examining a genre from multiple scholarly vantage points; however, there are some important subtleties that indicate the variety of ways these genres might be performed. Different sets of lyrics might be sung to different melodies. For example, the lyrics used in Kammu feast songs and the lyrics used in songs typically sung outside feasting carry different song tunes (Lundström 2010). Certain groups might have more flexibility with their lyrics, while others might have more concrete sets of sung poetry, which is a defining difference between the two main groups of hua'er singing, Taomin hua'er and Hezhou hua'er (Tuohy 1988). The lyrics might have an observable influence on the melodic frames they inhabit, which has been recorded in the singing of the Kammu (Lundström 2010) and the Tai Dam (Lissoir and Demolin 2015); or there might not be any discernable correlation between linguistic tones and the melodic pitches, which is the case for the shan'ge in Jiangsu (Schimmelpenninck 1997). Finally, since all of the song genres discussed are noted to rely heavily on local dialects for lyric construction, it is likely that many of the metaphors and expressions are specific to the cultures singing them.

Geographic Tune Association

While the concept of geographic centers in music and culture has existed in different forms in the West for centuries and has been debated in modern academic discourse, it finds a much more specific manifestation in strophic song forms in the areas under discussion. This manifestation is not only in terms of the narrowness of the melodic frames used in singing, but is also in terms of the small size of and small number of tunes in a given geographic area. Single song tunes are

often the dominant form of music making in a given area that is similar in size to a county or smaller. Schimmelpenninck describes this single-tune region aspect in the following way:

One recognizes a singer's origins by his speech and by the shape and sound of his *shan'ge* tune. In fact the tunes are sometimes named after the village regions where they are sung; they carry names like *Dongting shan'ge*, *Luxu shan'ge*, *Baimao shan'ge*. It is significant that local singers are usually unfamiliar with *shan'ge* tunes from other regions of the Wu area. (1997:267)

Lundström acknowledges that the geographic tune association found in *shan'ge* is similar to genres of Kammu singing, stating that “this parallels Kammu practice and is also the practice in Laotian tradition where the local styles of *lam* or *khap* are often named by city, village, or area” (2010:173). The *khap* of the Tai Dam is no exception to this. In an analysis of melody types of different Tai Dam singers, Lissoir notes that the kind of *khap* that is sung is associated with local accents, which in turn is associated with locations. For example, “the inhabitants of Thongnamy, Houay Yong and Sèr, all Tai Wat, only perform *khap Tai Wat*. A Tai Wat can of course interpret a *khap Tai Longmaa* for instance, but will immediately be *spotted* as a Tai Wat singer performing a *khap Tai Longmaa* because of the local accent” (2014). In her comparison of village and staged traditions of the Kam, Ingram states that “in the ‘village tradition,’ groups perform songs from the unique repertoire of their home region, and rarely notate or otherwise record these songs” (2012:59). Finally, while not emphasizing geographic specificities of melody in her work on hua'er singing, Tuohy does acknowledge that “while people are singing (or after), others will announce: ‘that’s a *Third Hezhou Ling* [type of hua'er song],’ ‘that’s a Hezhou hua'er,’ or ‘this is the hua'er of our area’” (1988:141-142).

As with our first two characteristics of strophic singing mentioned above, researching different aspects of these song genres has identified important elements to consider when observing geographic association of these tunes. The first is that tune association with place

might not have the same strength or characteristics with other genres of music. Lundström cautions against using tune regions of strophic singing to “characterize a regional musical culture. It is limited to one or a few vocal genres” (2010:173n258). A second point of consideration is that tune association might continue after a forced or voluntary migration from one area to another. This can be seen in Lissoir’s research on the Tai Dam. Though the Tai Dam interviewed by Lissoir were in Laos, they had roots in Vietnam, having fled their homeland in the 1950s and 1970s. Despite being in Laos for a generation, their ideal version of khap was still tied to an identity associated with their home village (Lissoir 2015). A third element is the difficulties in mapping these tune associations due to the geographic area researched being too large, or in an area where traditional singing has declined significantly. The complication of the size of a given region can be seen when attempting to categorize hua’er tunes across multiple counties, where a large number of melodies and ways of speaking about strophic singing are used. This is why Tuohy cautions that the diversity of hua’er spread across a broad geographic area presents an obstacle for defining and classifying these songs (1988:150). The difficulty of fading cultural tradition is acknowledged by Schimmelpennick, who laments that mapping a “a full reconstruction of the ‘melodic network’ of shan’ge [in the Wu area] is no longer possible” (1997:260). As Ingram observes, additional confusion can be added on top of these two complications in the form of cultural interventions and staged performances, where singers perform the melodies of other areas instead of their own (2012:60).

Use of Singing at Festivals and to Find Life Partners

The dominance of these melodic frames in many of the areas where they occur, combined with their value of lyrical quality, typically means that a wide variety of lyrics can be sung to

them. However, the most commonly acknowledged lyrics to shan'ge and related song forms are love songs, due to their role in finding marital and sexual partners. While these songs have traditionally been able to occur at any time and at any place appropriate to the activity, they are most famous for their inclusion in annual gatherings where young women and men can meet, sing, and engage in courting activities. In Yang Mu's comprehensive article concerning erotic musical activity (EMA) in China, the Zhuang, the Kam (referred to as the Dong), and the ethnic groups singing hua'er are all mentioned as having courtship activities associated with their traditional singing (1998). These assertions are echoed in the work of Ingram, who acknowledges that Kam traditional songs are taught and then sung between groups of men and women "in various celebrations following New Year" (2012:54). Tuohy also confirms Yang Mu's research, observing that "the festival or temple fair has generally been considered a relatively unrestricted arena where the prohibitions are relaxed on the slopes surrounding the temple fair" (1988:170).

The singing of the Kammu, though having a connection with courtship, has fewer mentions of love-seeking activities being associated with festivals. For example, Proschan proclaims that "[Kammu] courtship traditions are part of a much larger cultural complex in East Asia, and especially Southeast Asia, of antiphonal love dialogues, usually between a boy and girl who engage in a friendly competition in verse" (1992:13), but does not connect this kind of antiphonal singing with a festival. Lundström also mentions love songs and references the use of songs in courtship, but only mentions that the main time for singing and learning to sing is during the months leading up to the Fall harvest (2010:37). While not explicitly mentioning festivals, the connection of these activities to a wider Asian culture by Proschan and the time of year mentioned by Lundström indicate that festivals may be a part of traditional song culture.

This assertion is supported by Carol Ireson-Dolittle's study of the Kammu, where she writes that "festival days and parties following ritual sacrifices and fasts for ancestors are the scene of much courting, though an interested young man may visit a young woman" (1996:98).

Conversely, Schimmelpenninck and Lissoir mention the singing of love songs and the existence of singing at festivals, but do not make any overt connections to these activities and traditions of courtship. Lissoir mentions that singing is done at festivals, and that repartee songs and love songs are important to traditional singers, but does not mention any traditional role in courtship (2010). Schimmelpenninck mentions the role folk songs have played in traditional festivals and that songs contain lyrics concerning love and courtship. However, she also acknowledges that, due to the dominance of arranged marriage in mainstream Chinese society, "love dialogues sung in the fields were primarily a celebration of youthful dreams and (sometimes) opportunities for short-lived affairs" (Schimmelpenninck 1997:77).

The Shan'ge of the Zhuang

In a similar manner to the way that *fien*'s primary traits can be observed across a wide area encompassing multiple ethnicities, many of the issues discussed about in these genres of strophic singing can be seen in Zhuang *shan'ge*. To gain an understanding of how the *shan'ge* of the Zhuang is discussed, I focus for the most part on the *shan'ge* of the Zhuang who live in Baise Prefecture.²⁴ In Fan Ximu's anthology of one hundred Zhuang folksongs (2009), a third of his examples (33) are from Baise Prefecture. While Baise is only one of fourteen prefectures in Guangxi, most of the Zhuang in Guangxi live in the four prefectures of Baise, Nanning, Hechi,

²⁴ While it could be argued that it is inappropriate to use a Chinese-language term to refer to a body of Zhuang-language songs, I choose to occasionally use the term *shan'ge* because it reflects the similarities *fien* has with some genres of singing found in ethnic groups spread throughout China. Additionally, *shan'ge* is still frequently used by scholars studying *fien* and similar styles of singing among the different groups of Zhuang.

and Liuzhou. Furthermore, Baise is also an intersection of Zhuang/Tai dialect branches, with northern Zhuang dialects (of the northern Tai branch) making up the upper two-thirds of the prefecture, and southern Zhuang dialects (of the southern Tai branch) making up the lower third. Consequently, of the sixteen commonly acknowledged Zhuang dialects, five can be found in Baise. This variety extends to the kinds of shan'ge that can be found in Baise Prefecture. There are both single-melody and polyphonic song tunes; song tunes might exist in the same geographic areas as other genres of music such as opera and instrumental genres; and it is not uncommon for multiple tunes to exist in each dialect region. Furthermore, there may be a few more than 33 shan'ge tunes in Baise Prefecture. In the course of my own fieldwork, I have been made aware of one melody in Youjiang District, one in Tianyang (which is the main subject of this dissertation), and one melody in Tiandong that are not in Fan Ximu's short collection. These complexities make examining the Zhuang shan'ge in Baise a kind of microcosm of shan'ge as a whole. In this section though, I transition from focusing on the existence of specific melodic, lyrical, geographical, and cultural features, and instead examine how a broader group of scholars address these aspects of shan'ge in the singing of the Zhuang.

Melody in Discussions of Zhuang Shan'ge

Many of the discussions of Zhuang shan'ge up to the present have been similar to those covering shan'ge throughout China, as mentioned by Schimmelpenninck, concerning the lack of attention given to monothematism (1997). For example, Shen Qia's article in the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* discusses the music of the Zhuang primarily in terms of pitch sets and tonal intervals. While he does mention a "frame of a fifth," reflecting "an emphasis in [Yue-Pu] scales on the fifth degree up or down from the tonic center" (Shen Qia 2001:486), this is an

assertion concerning the music of a very large number of diverse people groups. What is meant by “Yue-Pu” is the majority, if not the entirety, of Tai and Mon-Khmer language speakers. Much of the literature written on Zhuang shan’ge is similarly broad in scope. This can be seen in articles comparing Zhuang and Dong (Kam) shan’ge (Yang Xiuzhao 1997), and the trend of discussing Zhuang music through speaking of multiple, if not all, Zhuang groups in one article. Most of the attention given to individual tunes focuses on the basic shape of one or two iterations of the melody. This is especially common in large anthologies, such as the Guangxi volume of China’s anthology of folk song melodies²⁵ edited by Lu Ji (1995) or Fan Ximu’s collection of one hundred songs. A combination of the presentation of single tunes and a strong tendency for comparison of general characteristics can be seen in the attention paid to multipart songs. These analyses typically feature the spectrum of multipart song tunes and compare them to aspects of tonal harmony from Western culture. For example, Lu Huabai asserts that, even though Western culture might have a more widespread tradition in harmony, the functional harmony of Zhuang multipart songs is just as strong (1986:112). Shen Qia adds that the multipart singing of the Zhuang is ancient form that did not come about through Western interference (2001:490).

In addition to works covering broad aspects of form and comparison, there are also prominent scholars researching Zhuang music who mention more specific aspects of the melody used in Zhuang singing. Some of these scholars not only acknowledge the phenomenon of a changing melodic frame that is made up of variants, but also seek to understand them in further detail. Zhou Guowen, in his examination of six Zhuang song tunes from Napo County in Baise Prefecture, summarizes his melodic analysis by stating that “there is no kind of song that

²⁵ China’s anthology of folk song melodies is a part of a much larger folk music anthology encompassing all of the recognized ethnicities in China. Each volume is identified by province and by category of music. Additional details concerning the larger anthology can be found in Stephen Jones’ seminal article on the topic (2003).

possesses a single standard tune; what is possessed is only a basic tune-frame that is relatively stable” (2005:121). In looking at these six different tune-frames, Zhou details major sections of melodic and lyrical phrases, how they join to each other, and what kind of vocables are used when the melody is sung. Bai Xue has also further explored song tune variations within narrow structural constraints in her analysis of multipart *liao* songs in Pingguo County and east Tiandong.²⁶ Her work focuses on elements of the song tunes and song culture that change and elements that are consistent. Like Zhou, Bai acknowledges a “melodic and rhythmic frame” (2015:162), but also adds word divisions and sections of melody (marked by the vocable *liao*) to the list of what is consistent. Change occurs within these constant features. The two major divisions in *liao* song tunes each have two lyrical phrases that must shift their positions in their tune divisions to keep certain words intact. Bai views this interplay between these phrases as the lyrics are organized in their tune sections (along with additional vocables) as a locus of creativity in the *liao* songs (2015).

Lyrics in Discussions of Zhuang Singing

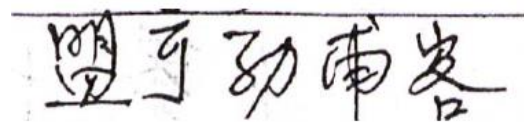
Much of the detailed information on Zhuang singing in academic literature, including virtually all publications in English, focuses on its folkloric and linguistic aspects. This is due partly to the amount of change in the lyrics relative to the tune itself. Improvisation of lyrics is a prominent feature of Zhuang singing, and one that is occasionally audible in performance when one of the singers will speak the words to her/his companions just before they sing a given strophe. The oral nature and improvisatory element present in the lyrics of Zhuang shan’ge fit

²⁶ *Liao* songs are a kind of Zhuang shan’ge named for the vocable *liao*, which occurs in the middle and at the end of each strophe that occurs in each repetition of the song tunes used to sing these songs. They are also famous for the small booklets singers use as prompts for their singing.

well into Lu Xiaoqin’s description of having a “fixed tune, but not fixed lyrics” (2016:8). Each time the lyrics are sung, the lyrics change, both because of the large amount of content available and because of the different ways this content can be worded. Consequently, the geographic area covered by lyric collections is often narrower than those of tune anthologies. David Holm’s collection of religious chant lyrics is from a region on the border of Tianyang County (Baise Prefecture) and Bama Yao Autonomous County (Hechi Prefecture) (2004). Collections of *liao* song lyrics come from song books found in east Tiandong County and in Pingguo County. Even in a recent anthology of literature from around China, the Zhuang singing presented comes from a single location in Liuzhou (Mair and Bender 2011).

Another reason for the large number of song lyric collections is because the Zhuang preserve their songs by writing out the lyrics. While the most famous example of these books is the *liao* songs (due to the established age of the writing tradition), it has become a common practice, especially with the overall increase in education, for singers from other areas to write down their lyrics. Often, these collections use a traditional writing system that employs Chinese characters—sometimes for meaning and sometimes for approximate pronunciation—and Zhuang

Figure 2.2: A short sample of Zhuang writing from Huang Wenke 2018a.



characters made from the components of Chinese characters. For example, in Figure 2.2, the final

character uses the meaning from the Chinese

character for guest (客 kè in Mandarin) for a Zhuang

word with the same meaning, but a different pronunciation, *hek*.²⁷ Moreover, the first character in the line uses the pronunciation from the Chinese character for ally (盟 méng) for the Zhuang

²⁷ If Cantonese pronunciation is taken into account, this character could be seen as representing both pronunciation and meaning, since the Cantonese for guest, *haak*, is very similar to the Zhuang pronunciation.

word for “you,” *mengz*; the second character uses the pronunciation from the Chinese character for the verb can (可 kě) for the Zhuang word for “also,” *goj*; and the fourth character uses a pronunciation similar to the Chinese character for the surname Fu (甫) for the Zhuang measure word for people, *bux*. Finally, the middle character uses the Chinese radical for child (子) and the pronunciation of the beginning of the word for strength (力 lì) to create a new character for the Zhuang measure word for child, *lwg*.²⁸ These booklets could be said to be the best way of “represent Native conceptualizations” of singing accurately (Browner 2009:xxv). Because of this value of lyrics and because of the cyclical nature of Zhuang song melodies, one might even say that the written textual prompts are a kind of prescriptive notation that have “developed in response to the particular requirements of the tradition they serve” (Hood 1971:62).

Song lyrics are often analyzed in terms of rhyme pattern and song topic. The most common rhyme pattern observed is a waist rhyme, where lines of lyrics alternate between rhyming the end and middle lines of text (see Example 1). However, other kinds of rhymes might be observed as well, such as the end rhymes (Example 2) familiar in the West and head-foot rhymes (Example 3), where the end of the first line rhymes with the first syllable of the next line.

1. OOOOX
OOXOO
2. OOOOX
OOOOX
3. OOOOX
XOOOO

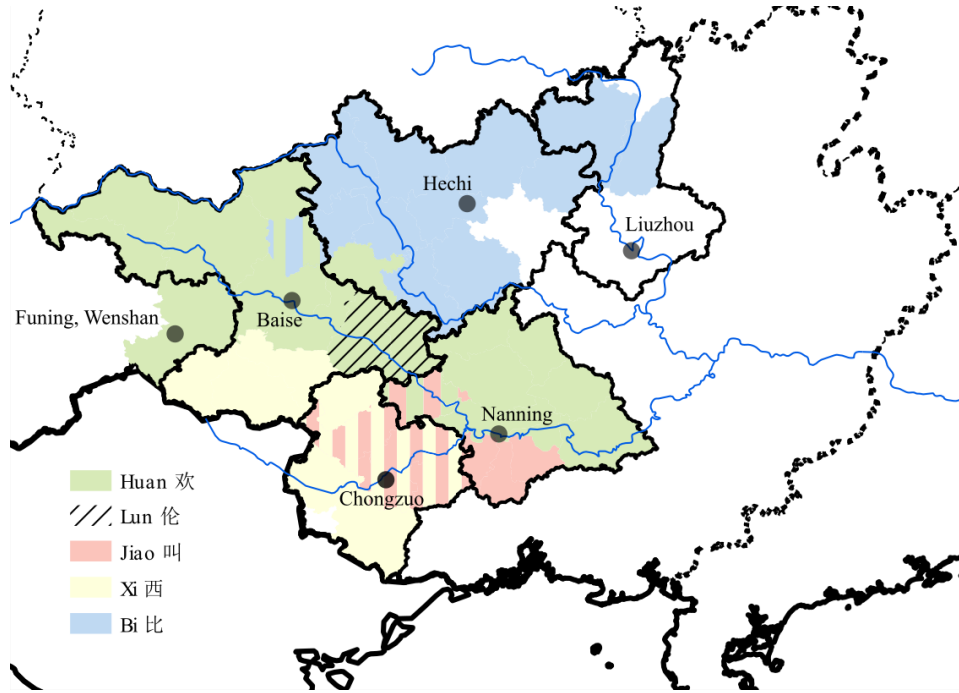
²⁸Together, these characters make the sentence *mengz goq lwg bux hek*, meaning “you are also a guest.” For more information on traditional Zhuang script, see Holm 2004 and Holm 2008.

Song topics often coincide with the names given to them by Zhuang singers. However, these names can vary depending on the song collection. One reason for this is that the kinds of songs sung can change between dialect areas and even between individual singers. Further complicating this issue is the Mandarin Chinese approximations of Zhuang-language designations of songs, which span multiple dialects for each Zhuang word. In the case of Lu Xiaoqin's work in Debao and Jingxi, the Chinese word *xi* (西) is used because it is similar to those whose word for song is *si*. Although the area of Lu's research is inside the geographic area covered by the character 西, *sei* is a more common pronunciation of the word for song.

Although the study of language and musical tones is still a topic of interest in studies of shan'ge in different areas of China, there is only one study of this aspect of Zhuang shan'ge. A short survey of multiple Zhuang songs from Wuming published in 1966 finds that there is a mutual interaction between pitch movement of speech and song in this area (Mark and Li). A much more popular recent topic in the research on Zhuang shan'ge lyrics has come with the publication of an English translation of liao songs. With this publication, multiple articles have been authored comparing characteristics of the liao songs with classic English poetry, many of which were presented at the dedication of these books in 2012. Issues surrounding this topic include comparisons of courtship and marriage customs (Zhang Yu 2011), aspects of style (Liao Zhi'en 2010), and different metaphors (Zhou Yanxian 2011) with those that can be found in Western poetry.

Geography in Discussions of Zhuang Singing

Figure 2.3: A rough sketch of Chinese cognate mapping of Zhuang words in Guangxi and Yunnan as referenced in Shen 2001 and Fan 2009. Some additions in Guangxi are made by the author.



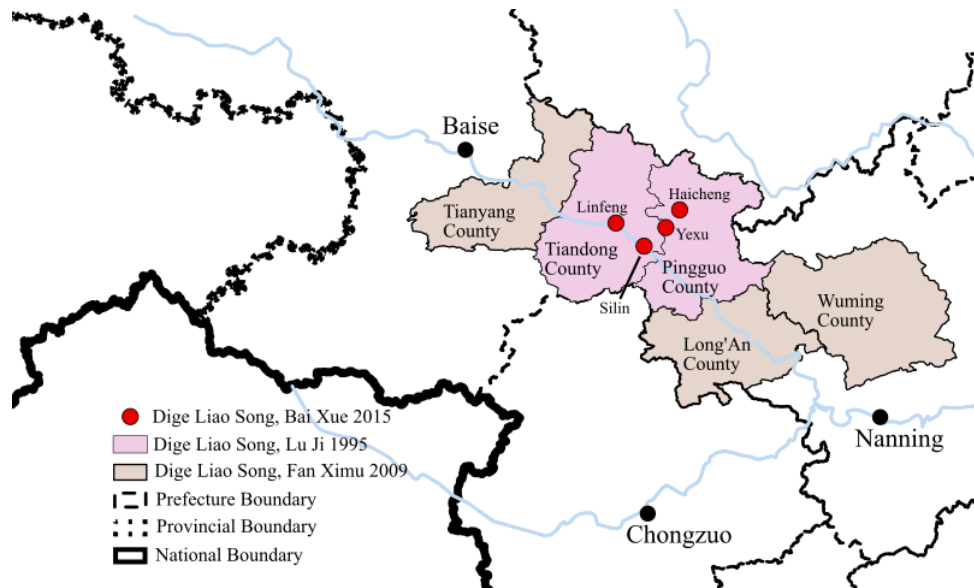
Academic handling of the distribution of different Zhuang melodies across Guangxi occurs in both broad and narrow granularities. Broad references to geographic distribution follow the Sinicized pronunciation of major forms of Zhuang words for song. In addition to *xi* 西, there is also *huan* 欢, *bi* 比, and *lun* 伦. The elaborations of the geographic coverage of these terms is often inconsistent. In Shen Qia's elaboration of these categories, multiple counties are listed for each term except for *bi*, which only has one county connected to it and a vague description of being used in north and northwest Guangxi (2001:489). Conversely, Fan Ximu lists nine counties for *bi* but does not list any for *huan*, instead mentioning that it is found along the northern regions of the Hongshui River, in some southern regions, and in parts of Wenshan (2009:5). Even the labels themselves have issues with consistency. *Xi* 西 might be listed as *shi* 诗 instead,

and there is an additional term, *jiao* 叫, which is included in some lists, but not in others (Figure 2.3). As mentioned above, the Mandarin pronunciations of these words for song are sometimes far removed from the Zhuang pronunciations they stand for. “Huan” 欢 is used to stand for pronunciations that range from *fwen* to *vuen* to *fien*. *Luen* 伦 is used as a stand-in for the vocable *liao* from the tunes used in Pingguo, which are also called *fwen*.

More specific details of the distribution of tunes can be found in tune anthologies and in studies of Zhuang music based in a given geographic area. Tunes in the compilations by Fan Ximu and Lu Ji are acknowledged for the counties they occur in, with occasional listings of towns for isolated tunes. Area-based studies, on the other hand, have finer granularity to the level of towns, and sometimes to villages. This change in focus often gives much more clarity because, while many of the tune areas are roughly the size of counties, they typically do not respect county boundaries. Listing the counties where these tunes occur, while helpful, often creates the illusion of a tune that has a greater geographic area than it has in reality. This is further complicated by the migration of singers and the desire for some to claim a wide influence for the melody being described. This can also create discrepancies between different areas attributed to a given tune. For example (see Figure 2.4), the Guangxi volume of the Chinese anthology of folk song melodies lists the *dige liao* song melody as occurring in Pingguo and Tiandong Counties (Lu Ji 1995). The entry in Fan’s collection of one hundred Zhuang songs, while mentioning that *dige liao* songs originated in Silin Town, states that they have spread to Pingguo, Tianyang, Long’an, and Wuming Counties (Fan Ximu 2009). Bai Xue’s extensive work on *liao* songs provides a much clearer picture, observing that the *dige liao* song tune

typically occurs in Silin and Linfeng Towns in Tiandong County and Yexu Town and Haicheng Township in Pingguo County (2015).

Figure 2.4: Different interpretations of the geographic extent of the *dige liao* song tune.



Song Fairs in Discussions of Zhuang Singing

As with the other elements of Zhuang singing discussed in this section, there is a significant amount of variation in the kinds of song fairs and the ways they are treated in articles and monographs. One of the simplest and clearest ways to illustrate this is to look at the time period of the song fairs. The most commonly cited date of the Zhuang singing fairs in both academic and popular literature is the third day of the third lunar month.²⁹ In 1983, this date was officially recognized by the Guangxi government as a day for celebrating song fair culture in the capital of Nanning. However, while this day is a popular date for song fairs, it is by no means universal. Most lists of song fairs occurring in their traditional locations have a wider variety of dates, both in academic literature and in casual lists online (see Qin and Widman 2012). There are multiple

²⁹ The third day of the third lunar month usually falls between the beginning and the middle of April in the Julian Calendar.

counties where the third day of the third lunar month doesn't even have the majority of song fairs. Indeed, when Zhou Guowen lists forty song fairs occurring in Napo County, only one fair is noted to occur on the third day of the third lunar month (2005:12-13). Even though this lunar date could be seen as a kind of median-date for these annual singing events, it is important to acknowledge that there are many places where this date is still an auspicious day, but not the day for the song fair.

Because of the significance and variety present at these singing fairs in Zhuang culture, there are multiple avenues of discussion for these events. Lu Xiaoqin outlines five major areas of song fair research: nomenclature applied to song fairs, the origins and development of song fairs, the significance and function of song fairs, the content and form of song fairs, and local song fair customs (2016:45-56). While many monographs and articles touch on a few, if not all five, of these research topics, most researchers have one or two aspects that dominate their discussion. Ping Feng's study of the Ganzhuang Mountain song fair focuses on field research and the significance and function of the song fair, paying close attention to how the song fair is dependent on other aspects of Zhuang culture for its existence. He asserts that the way the Zhuang have made a living for themselves, existed in society, and thought about the world around them has enabled the song fair "to continue through the generations to the present" (2017:99). Pan Quxu's book on song fairs is dedicated mostly to a discussion of song fair origins and song fair forms. His assertion of religious origins of song fairs discussed in the introduction is part of a much more detailed discussion in which he examines five categories of origin legends surrounding song fairs: celebrating the harvest and praying for another harvest; finding lovers

through song; remembering legends of ancient lovers; paying homage to Third Sister Liu;³⁰ or the gathering of a clan or clans together (2010:52–56). Lu Xiaoqin’s book, while mentioning multiple aspects of song fair research, explores the singing traditions in the hamlet of Buyao in Jingxi County through the lens of local terminology and concepts, such as how traditional song is known for “warming” the house (2016). On the issue of terminology, Bai Xue explores four possible meanings of song fairs that can be derived from local references to liao song gatherings. The first is staged performances that occur at the time of traditional singing events and are organized by the government. The second meaning references informal gatherings that can occur at night at any time of the year between male and female singers. A third form of song gathering happens during holidays, when people will gather in open areas to sing. A fourth and final meaning of song fair is the major annual gatherings that are typically referenced by the term (Bai Xue 2013).

The Geographic and Musical Context of the Fien of the Youjiang Zhuang

With the amount of variation in academic sources on Zhuang shan’ge, especially in broader anthologies and collections, it can be tempting to criticize the incompleteness and inconsistencies of some of these works. However, most of the information presented in these resources is extremely useful for verifying information on traditional singing. This reflects ethnomusicologist Stephen Jones’s evaluation of the nationwide anthology of folk music, where he declares that, despite its limitations, “if one learns to read between the lines, the amount of local material for a broad spectrum of music-making is truly amazing” (2003:330). When examining scholarly work

³⁰ Third Sister Liu, also known as Liu Sanjie, is a Zhuang ancestral figure famous for her singing. Though she is mostly celebrated in the areas around Guilin in north-central Guangxi, she has also been heavily promoted as a symbol of Zhuang culture since the late 1950s. This is likely due to versions of stories about her where the antagonist is a rich landlord.

about the Zhuang, “reading between the lines” often means recognizing the degree of granularity in a given work. For example, the third day of the third lunar month, while not a date for many song fairs, works as a symbolic date because it occurs in the middle of the time period where most of them occur. “Huan” 欢, while a bit far removed from the pronunciation of fien, is close enough to cover broad dialectal trends. This concept of granularity is important because even indigenous and localized terminology may need to be further clarified to create a clear picture for those who are not from there. Even a specific sounding phrase such as the “fien of the Youjiang Zhuang” is not narrow enough to cover a single tune area. In the area designated as the Youjiang dialect region, there are at least six tune areas where a single shan’ge tune is the dominant form of traditional music making. Furthermore, the Youjiang dialect region itself has areas that more closely resemble the dialects that border it. Before analyzing the fien that occurs in northern Youjiang District, Tianyang County, and Tiandong County, it is important to further clarify the geographic and musical context where it occurs.

The Geographic Context of Tianzhou Fien

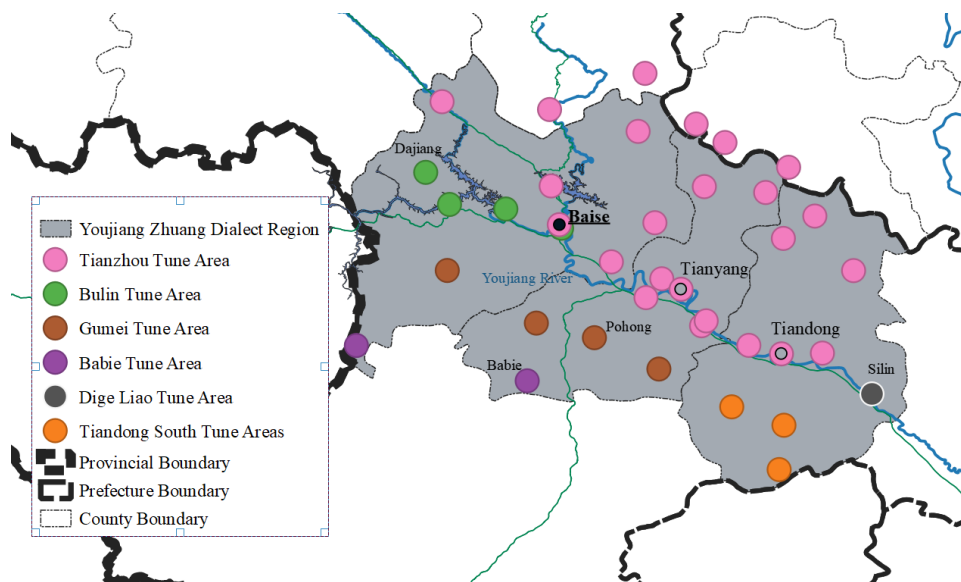


Figure 2.5: The Youjiang Zhuang dialect area and some of its major tune locations.

In order to understand what is meant by the *fien* of the Youjiang Zhuang, it is first important to define what is meant by Youjiang Zhuang. The area mapped as belonging to the Youjiang Zhuang, like many of the tune areas, is placed according to county boundaries. A map of Zhuang dialects typically portrays the Youjiang dialect by highlighting Youjiang District, Tianyang County, and Tiandong County. However, there are towns and townships in all of these locations where other dialects overlap and may even be dominant. For example, the Zhuang spoken to the west of Baise, near the township of Dajiang, is closer to the Guibian dialect (spoken in northwest Baise Prefecture) than to Youjiang Zhuang. Xinmei village in Pohong Town, Tianyang County, which I visited in 2011 for a song fair, has people who can speak dialects associated with both Northern and Southern Zhuang. Finally, the Zhuang spoken in Silin Town in Tiandong is closer to the Yongbei dialect (also known as the Wuming dialect). In each of these areas there is correlation between these dialects spoken at the fringes of the place inhabited by the Youjiang Zhuang and the songs sung in those regions. In categorizing *fien* geographically, then, we could say that the song tunes in those regions are not those of the Youjiang Zhuang, but of different groups of Zhuang. This is especially true for the singing style in the southernmost region of Tianyang, where the word for “song” is no longer *fien*, but *sei* or one of its derivatives. It is possible that a similar case might exist for the dialects and songs in southern Tiandong, but this would need further research.

Limiting our selection to a strict interpretation of the Youjiang dialect reduces the number of song tunes that could be called *fien* in this area. However, there are still at least two to four tunes that could still be categorized as *fien*. The most prominent of these tunes are the Tianzhou tune and the Gumei tune, which are very different from each other, and have different geographic centers. The Gumei tune is a two-part tune that typically only permits four lines for each iteration

of the tune. It has its geographic center in Pohong Town, Tianyang County, south of the Youjiang river valley. The Tianzhou tune is a kind of *pai'ge* (拍歌), a term meaning “songs in a row.”³¹ In the areas encompassing the Youjiang river valley and extending north, this form of singing allows an individual singer to perform as many incomplete iterations as she or he wants before finishing with a distinct closing iteration. These two forms of singing also correlate with variations in the Youjiang Zhuang dialect. Although much of the pronunciation of words is the same, the language tones differ between the two areas. Because of the differences in the tune types, only one is being examined in this study, the Tianzhou tune.

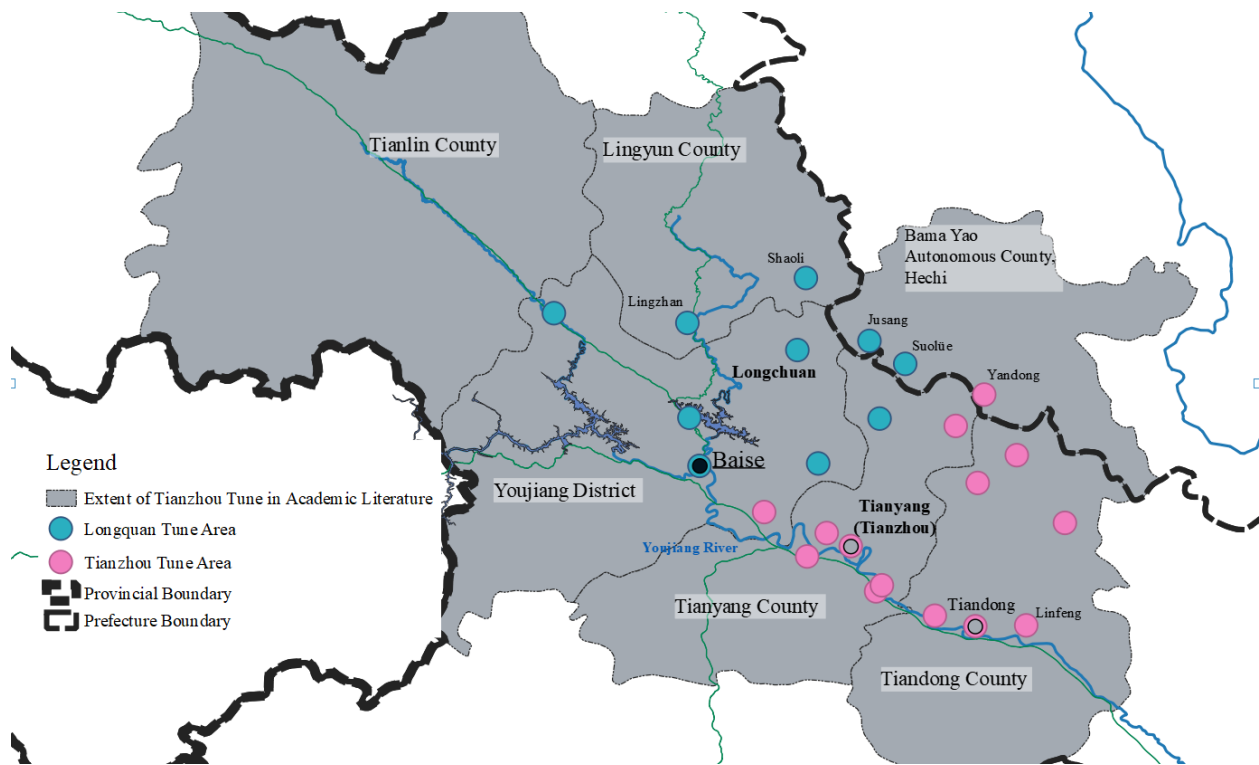


Figure 2.6: The geographic extent of the Tianzhou tune and its two branches.

A similar pattern of differing layers of information regarding specificities of song tunes that was illustrated in the *dige liao* song tune can be seen in examining literature covering the

³¹ *Pai'ge* is a Mandarin Chinese term that is used to define a widespread singing style found among the Zhuang, though there are some Zhuang who use the near-cognate *fien baiz*. Most Zhuang differentiate song types from different areas through following the word *fien* with the place name, which in this case would be *fien Dianzou*.

Tianzhou tune. It is absent from Fan's list of 100 folk songs, while the other prominent tune in Tianyang County, the Gumei tune, maintains a presence. This is likely due not only to the limitation of 100 song tunes, but also to the amount of attention given to multipart songs. In Fan's collection, this preference for multipart tunes can be seen in the fact that the primary division in his selections is between songs with a single melodic line and those that are multipart (2009). The Tianzhou tune does have an entry in the Guangxi volume of China's anthology of folk song melodies, where it is listed as having a center in Tianyang and a range covering Lingyun, Tianlin, and the Youjiang River Valley (Lu Ji 1995:127-128). Both the written collection of lyrics associated with the Tianzhou tune (Zhang 1997) and Ping Feng's 2017 anthropological study have a similar area designated for this tune, but also add Baise (Youjiang District) and Bama Yao Autonomous County, which is in Hechi Prefecture. Since Ping's study is based in Tianyang, he clarifies that the song occurs primarily in the north part of that county.

From my own travel to song fairs, discussions with VCD sellers, conversations with Professor Qin, and conversations with local singer Huang Wenke, a map of the Tianzhou tune can be further narrowed down with a reasonable degree of accuracy. The Youjiang River basin forms the southern border of this tune area, extending west to the southeast corner of Tianlin (likely crossing over the county border to a few villages, but not much further) and east as far as Linfeng. To the north, the Tianzhou tune reaches up to Lingzhan and Shaoli Towns in Lingyun and Jusang, Suolüe, and Yandong Townships in Bama. It is of further importance to note that the Tianzhou tune can be subdivided into two similar tunes regarded as different by local singers. The first keeps Tianzhou as its central location and represents the eastern half of the tune area. The second finds its center in Longchuan Town and makes up the western half of the tune area. The primary difference between these two tunes is in dialectical changes used in their singing.

Huang Wenke, who sings the Tianzhou tune and sells VCDs of traditional singing, told me that the first time he heard the Longchuan tune, he had difficulty understanding what was being said for this reason (2018c). The Longchuan tune also differs in the number of singers, more often featuring two single singers. Performances of the Tianzhou tune usually feature two groups of two or more people. Finally, there are subtle differences in the song tunes themselves and in the vocables most commonly used in each area.

Before going further, it should be acknowledged that my own map of the Tianzhou and Longchuan tunes is not comprehensive. Some towns and townships on the borders of song tune areas are divided, with different villages featuring different song tunes. In order to find out the precise definition of a given tune area, all of the villages on the border of the tune area would need to be visited. In the case of two tunes that are sometimes considered to be the same, there may be no clear dividing line where one tune starts and the other begins geographically. Another topic of importance regarding the margins of tune areas is towns or villages where there might be singers who sing multiple tunes. While not very common, I have occasionally come across singers who easily switch between song tunes depending on the group of people they are singing to. Better understanding how traditional singers have had the opportunity to learn multiple tunes might provide a clearer picture of how tunes travel in local areas.

Even though there is still work to be done in mapping out the Tianzhou tune more clearly, the present state of this tune map does provide a good starting point for discussing the musical environment of this area. Exploring this map and how it could be made better highlights some of the complexities in researching shan'ge tunes in China and Southeast Asia. Because of these complexities, Professor Qin urged me to limit my research to a smaller geographic area rather than trying to understand both the Longchuan tune and the Tianzhou tune, even though they are

occasionally referred to as being the same. I heeded this advice, spending most of my time researching the Tianzhou tune as sung in central Tianyang and northern Tiandong.

The Musical Environment of Tianzhou Fien

Although the Tianzhou tune is the dominant form of traditional music making in the towns where it occurs, there are other kinds of music present in this geographic space. This is similar to the musical environment described by Schimmelpenninck for the Wu dialect speakers of southern Jiangsu Province, where “many shan’ge singers know at least three or four distinctly different tunes,” but only one is used for most of the singing (1997:226-227). A basic understanding of the other traditional genres that have shared the same geographical area with the Tianzhou tune can help us better understand the nature of fien and provide additional avenues for testing literary boundaries that might be marked by different forms of music making.

The second most prominent kind of music to the Tianzhou shan’ge is another vocal genre called *dangzvuengz* (from the Chinese for *tanghuang* 唐皇), which is used for narrative songs.³² The stories that are sung to this tune are primarily of Han Chinese origin and are said to have begun their migration to Guangxi around the formation of the Song Dynasty (Barlow 2005). Notable stories include the ballad of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai (the Butterfly Lovers)³³ and the tale of Wenlong.³⁴ While the *dangzvuengz* songs share characteristics of a single cycled

³² The *tanghuang* genre’s name comes from one of the main stories sung to its tune, “The Tale of the Tang Emperor.”

³³ In this story, the heroine Zhu Yingtai disguises herself as a man to go to school. She meets Liang Shanbo and the two fall in love. However, Zhu Yingtai’s parents arrange a marriage between her and another man. When Liang Shanbo finds out, he dies of grief. As Zhu’s wedding procession passes Liang’s grave, Zhu throws herself in the grave, and the couple emerge as a pair of butterflies.

³⁴ In this tale, Wenlong is betrothed to a girl named Xiaoni. The two are in love, but Wenlong finds himself appointed to the capital after passing a state exam. When he is gone for too long, Xiaoni is promised to another man. Fortunately for the couple, Wenlong is able to return just before the marriage ceremony takes place.

melodic frame and a value of lyrics with fien, there are a couple of important differences between these two genres of music. The first is that the lyrics of *dangzvuengz* songs are fixed and passed down in written form. The scripts for these songs are known for employing a form of traditional Zhuang script that, while similar in form, is distinct from Chinese characters (see Holm 2008). While it is not unusual for fien to be written down as well, it is most often transmitted orally, and the specific lyrics are frequently improvised in the process of performance. A second difference can be seen in the primary performance context and method of these two genres. The *dangzvuengz* songs are typically sung in more private settings and are either sung solo or in unison with a small group (Qin 2018a). While fien can be sung in private settings, they are often sung out in the open and have the possibility of being used in singing exchanges, which is not a characteristic of the *dangzvuengz* tune. Furthermore, the number of people who are familiar with and can sing *dangzvuengz* are fewer than those who are familiar with and can sing fien. Despite these differences, there is one additional similarity that might be shared between these two genres of music: significant changes in song tune by geographic area. While I have not heard these stories sung outside the Tianzhou tune area, there is evidence in song tune collections for geographic tune association with the melodies used to sing these stories. For example, both Fan Ximu and Lu Ji's collection of song tunes both list a song melody used for singing epic songs in the southern half of Hechi Prefecture (Fan Ximu 2009:105-107 and Lu Ji 1995:245-246). Though the labels for the tunes used Fan and Lu's collections are different from each other, they are both named after stories associated with the *dangzvuengz* singing tradition ("The Tale of the Tang Emperor" and "The Tale of Wenlong" respectively). This would indicate that the group of texts sung in southern Hechi are similar to those sung in the Tianzhou tune area. However, despite the *dangzvuengz* song tradition's listing

as being in Tianyang, Tiandong, and Baise in Fan Ximu's 2009 collection, the tune used is distinct from the one I have found in my own research, which also appears in the Guangxi volume of the national anthology as the *dangzvuengz* tune (Lu 1995:247).

Another kind of music spread across the Tianzhou tune area is associated with traditional religious practice. Zhuang religious customs are a combination of ancestor worship, animism, and Daoism and involve practitioners of different levels and availability. There are generally two different types of mediators in traditional Zhuang religion, shamanesses and religious organizations, both of which frequently employ music in their ceremonies. The most public of these ceremonies are the Daoist and Mo religious organizations, whose members perform with combinations of ritual scripture reading, structured movement, and chant accompanied by small, handheld gongs. Some groups also use the *suona* (a double-reed pipe that is common throughout China) for processions, important occasions, and funerals.³⁵ Their performances are easily identified visually, with brightly colored pennants and decorated cloaks that are worn by the priests. Some of the chants bear a degree of similarity to both fien and narratives, since they employ the same overall structure as *pai'ge*. In his monograph on the Buluotuo scriptures³⁶ that are chanted at some of these ceremonies, David Holm describes *pai'ge* as having “no strict stanza structure and no fixed length. Length can run to several thousand lines in fwen baiz, which has been characterized as the ‘free verse of the Zhuang’” (2004:27).

The rituals of the shamaness are more private than those of the religious organizations. Shamanesses usually obtain their abilities through becoming sick and then being healed, either

³⁵ Stephen Jones has written extensively about both Daoist organizations and the use of the *suona* in ritual music, especially in northern China (Jones 2007, Jones 2010, Jones 2017).

³⁶ The Buluotuo scriptures are a collection of ancient Zhuang religious texts focusing on the ancestral deity Buluotuo. Since the early 1980s, Zhuang scholars have been finding, compiling, and translating these texts, both for their value as examples of Zhuang traditional religious literature and for their use of traditional Zhuang characters (Holm 2004).

by personal recovery, or with the help of another shamaness or Daoist priest (Qin 2018b). Singing is sometimes incorporated in shamanic ceremonies in a form that is close to chant (ibid.). Another similar category of singing is used for spirit possession. For this ceremony, a Daoist priest will give water to a woman, who will start to shake violently and then will sit up and sing about where the spirit who has possessed her is going (Qin 2018f). At this point, the person who has come to visit can present a request to the possessed person. As can be seen by the presence of a Daoist priest at these possession events and sometimes at the healing of a new shamaness, the religious music of the Zhuang is part of a complex tapestry of interrelated traditions. Teasing out the fine points of these traditions will require a good deal of research in the future because of the private nature of some of these rituals and because they were suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. Even now, they are often discouraged as a form of backward thinking. It is only through recent efforts by scholars such as Xiao Mei, of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, that some of these genres and relationships are being recorded (see 2012a and 2012b).

Beyond the categories of narrative song and religious songs, there are a couple of other tunes that exist in the Tianzhou area. There are lullabies in the form of soft chants that are intoned to young children. Some kinds of mourning also have their own tune, which is sung by women (Qin 2018f). Finally, there are probably other tunes that have come through the area from the outside that have had their lyrics translated or have been given new lyrics. A prominent recent example the Youjiang Zhuang adoption of an outside genre of music can be seen in Zhuang *kuaiban* (快板 *kuài bǎn*), a kind of rhythmic poetry chanted by one or more performers that spread through the introduction of government-staged performances around the middle of the twentieth century

(Qin Jindun 2017b).³⁷ One of these performers typically uses a two-piece bamboo clapper to provide an ostinato to accompany the chanting and to provide ornaments between major sections of lyrics. The chants are usually meant to be humorous and, for the Zhuang, cover political and life topics. Though this form of music making was introduced to Guangxi later than most genres that are considered to be part of Zhuang traditional music, it is mentioned alongside of older musical forms in some publications (Wei Xiujin 2011, Lu Xiaorong and Pan Guida 2015).

Conclusion

The differing perspectives on strophic song in China and Southeast Asia, the shan'ge of the Zhuang, and the geographic and musical contexts surrounding the Tianzhou tune area contribute important layers of understanding to the study of fien among the Youjiang Zhuang. Looking at the widespread nature of tune-frames and how they are discussed among scholars highlights the importance of the terminology used to discuss this musical phenomenon and of being aware of key features that distinguish forms of strophic singing from each other. In this dissertation, I will primarily rely on the concept of a frame when mentioning musical characteristics of fien. In discussions concerning fien, the definitions of tune or melody will be taken to encompass the concept of frame as well. Terms such as “iteration” or “variation” will be understood to have no original referent, but taken to mean that, unless otherwise specified, they have an equal share in the make-up of the frame. The diversity between tunes means that some of the characteristics of the Tianzhou tune-frame may not be reflected in other song types sharing a similar name, even in a similar dialect region. The Tianzhou tune distinguishes itself from others through the frequent occurrence of at least two singers for each group of performers, a narrow pitch range, and an

³⁷ Francesca Sborgi Lawson gives an excellent account of *kuaiban* in her book on Tianjin *shuochang* genres (2016).

incomplete form that repeats as long as desired until the strophe finishes with a finalizing melodic line. In order to tease out more of the specific workings of the Tianzhou tune, my analysis will also incorporate correlations between key vocables and pitches to help determine important sections of the melody.

The different perspectives on the value of lyrics emphasize the importance of the text in the analysis of strophic singing. With this in mind, the way different bodies of literature are associated with different melodies or musical forms in the Tianzhou tune area will be included in this dissertation to add additional redundancy to the testing of this study's hypothesis. Of these, special attention will be given to the *dangzvuengz* melody and to the rhythmic talking genre *kuaiban*. Regarding the way that text can influence variations in a given tune, iterations of the fien melody will be checked for correlations with the linguistic tones to see if they have a role in influencing the variation in the tune frame. Finally, the importance of lyrics also means that the primary written sources consulted for the next two chapters will be lyric collections such as the one compiled by Zhang Shengzhen (1997) and a collection Huang Wenke gave to me to help me learn fien (2018a).

Examining the geography and the annual singing events showcases details that are important for this study and for future research. Since the Tianzhou tune area covers a large part of Tianyang and Tiandong, it is critical to be aware that there may be variations in the tune-frame between the different locations in this area. Furthermore, some singers, such as Huang Wenke, while originally from Tianyang, now live in Baise. While his location is different, he would still refer to the tune he sings as being the Tianzhou tune. In the same manner, regardless of recording location, I will refer to the tune as the Tianzhou tune, unless otherwise stated. The song fairs that occur in this geographic area happen mainly in the second and third lunar months. These events

are often associated with temple festivals, where people come from nearby areas to burn incense and sing antiphonally before and after making their offering. However, as Bai Xue observes in her research on liao songs (2015), antiphonal singing is not limited to the temple festival, often happening whenever it is convenient for male and female groups to meet.

The fact that information about fien is transferable to styles of strophic singing present in ethnic groups beyond the Youjiang Zhuang, and even to some quite far removed from Guangxi, indicates the benefit the testing of this study's hypothesis might have for research on these genres. While there are variations in the way different tune-frames might present themselves, knowing these differences will allow for easier evaluation of this hypothesis if research is expanded. With this, we move to an investigation of the structural relationship between the melody and lyrics of the Tianzhou tune.

CHAPTER 3: YOUJIANG ZHUANG SYNTAX AND THE STRUCTURE OF FIEN

The first part of my hypothesis concerning the relationship between melody and language in the singing of the Youjiang Zhuang posits a correlation between iterations of *fien* and complete clauses of song lyrics. A simplistic example of what this correlation might look like was given in the introduction, where *Mel* represents a given iteration of a Zhuang song tune, and the bracketed words represents a group of lyrics (see Sentences 1 and 2 below). I assert that the first sentence would be seen as grammatical, since the song tune joins with a complete utterance, and that the second sentence would be seen as ungrammatical, or a construction that would generally not be used, because the utterance joining the melody is incomplete.

1. Mel [haet nix coiq ok lanz] This morning I went out of the house
 morning this I went out house
2. Mel [haet nix bux mbanx nix]* This morning those villagers
 morning this people (of) village these

In practice, however, determining what represents a complete iteration of Zhuang tunes and what a complete utterance is in Zhuang is more complicated than the simplified version I present above. Many tunes have a complete iteration that encompasses three to four lines of text with each repetition. This is the case of the *dige liao* tune discussed by Bai Xue (2013 and 2015) and used for the initial formulation of my hypothesis (See Figure 3.1). The two major divisions of this melody typically cover two lines of text with five syllables each. These major divisions are separated by the vocable *liao* (or *liu*).³⁸ To effectively analyze this kind of tune, both correlations

³⁸ *Liao* is the closest Mandarin Chinese pronunciation of the vocable used in this kind of song and is most commonly used in Chinese academic literature. *Liu* is how the vocable would likely be written using Romanized Zhuang.

between the lyrics and major tune divisions and correlations between the melody and individual lines of text need to be analyzed.

Figure 3.1: An example of line divisions in the dige liao song tune.³⁹ The vocable *liu* divides the four lines of this iteration into two sections. In this transcription, I have placed the first syllable of the second line of text at the end of the third full measure to reflect accent placement.

(na - di ge -) Daeq loh gauz neix nanz | Mbouj
to walk road this (degree) long Neg
(I) walk down a road this long

nyangz caek (ah) raemx (ah) moq (liu -) |
to meet one water new
(But I) haven't come across a single spring of water

(ah ah) Daeq loh gauz neix hung (lo -) |
to walk road this (degree) large
(I) walk down a road this large

Ngoengz (ah) neix (ah) fungz (ah) youx - noix - (liu) |
day this to bump lover few
(But) today (I) have only bumped into a few singers

The Tianzhou tune further adds to this issue by cycling an incomplete iteration until a closing variant of the tune is sung. A singer can easily go through over twenty incomplete iterations

³⁹ Huang Jinjun and Huang Mingli, translated by Yu Zhi, recorded by John Widman in Guangyang Town, Baise Prefecture, Guangxi, March 11, 2012.

representing between 25 and 30 lines of text before completing a given utterance of fien.

Furthermore, each iteration contains one or two lines of text. These features will be described in more detail below.

In addition to the complexity of line arrangement in Tianzhou fien, whether or not these lines of text might be considered complete utterances is another issue that will need to be examined. For this we will need to move beyond the definition of a sentence consisting of a subject and predicate to examining the requirements of some verbs to have direct and indirect objects. It will also be critical to consider the role context plays in whether or not these positions (arguments) are considered filled. Utterances that may be regarded as incomplete in isolation might be complete in their proper context. For example, in English, an utterance such as “over there” is regarded as complete if it is in response to a question such as “where did John go?” In Zhuang, it is not uncommon for subjects to be omitted if they are already known. Other aspects of Zhuang verb phrases and noun/determiner phrases are important to examine for determining the completeness of a given utterance.

In this chapter I will address these complexities of grammatical and melodic structure first before presenting an evaluation of the initial part of my hypothesis. This evaluation is based on 1.5 hours of analyzed recordings and references to the additional recordings taken in support of this study. The recordings selected for analysis include just over 500 lines of lyrics, 350 iterations of fien, and 40 completed sung utterances. The samples used in this survey come from ten different occasions, each in separate villages in the Youjiang dialect area, and were sung by fourteen different groups of singers, ranging from one to four people per group. My analysis of these selections strengthens my hypothesis through showing that the vast majority of lines can be

considered complete utterances, and that these lines do indeed correlate with specific sections and orientations of the Tianzhou tune.

Youjiang Zhuang Grammar and Syntax

What is a complete sentence in Zhuang, and what kinds of sentences (or utterances) might be considered incomplete? An exploration of this question requires an understanding of how this subject is generally handled in discussions of syntax. The classic notion of a sentence being made up of a subject and predicate is problematic here, because different verbs come with different requirements for completeness. The following sentences give three different kinds of verbs, each with a different number of positions that must be filled for a given sentence to be considered grammatical.

3. John runs
4. Ben hit the ball
5. Anna gave Sally a gift

The verb “run” in Sentence 3 only has one position (called an “argument” in syntax) that needs to be filled, that of the subject, John. Verbs such as “hit” have two arguments that need to be filled in order for a given utterance to be considered grammatical. “Ben hit” is incomplete, as is “hit the ball.” In a similar manner, a verb such as “give” has three arguments; in Sentence 5 these are “Anna,” “Sally,” and “a gift.” Different verbs can take different kinds of phrases (noun phrases, prepositional phrases, etc.) in different positions as their arguments. For example, the English verb “give” always takes a determiner phrase (DP)⁴⁰ in the subject position and a DP

⁴⁰ A determiner phrase is headed by a word such as the, a, this, his, etc., that specifies the reference of the noun. In generative syntax, determiners include names and some kinds of licensed possession (e.g. 's).

after the verb but can take either a DP or a prepositional phrase (PP) in the second position after the verb, as demonstrated in Sentence 6.

6. Anna gave a gift to Sally

However, differences in lexicons, verb formation, and even cultural expectations across linguistic boundaries can lead to significant differences in the number of arguments and how these arguments are presented (see Pylkkänen 2008). In order to discuss complete utterances in Zhuang, then, I examine differences in how prepositional phrases are used as arguments between English and Zhuang, verb forms common to Zhuang, and the structure of determiner phrases that often fill argument positions.

Introducing Differences in Argument Structure Between Languages

There are some aspects of Zhuang verbs that are very similar to English. If we were to rewrite Sentences 3, 4, and 5 in Zhuang, the argument positions would be the same (see Sentences 7-9). This is unsurprising, since Zhuang shares the same basic sentence order with English (Subject-Verb-Object or SVO).

7. goq biet

older brother run

8. goq daj aen giuz de

older brother hit classifier⁴¹ (CL) ball that

9. nuengx haej goq aen laex

sister give brother CL gift

⁴¹ Classifiers, also called measure words, denote categories of nouns. In Zhuang, the classifier *aen* denotes general inanimate objects.

However, a further analysis of Sentences 7 and 8 highlights important linguistic differences between the two languages. While the sentence “Ben hit the ball” can take an additional prepositional phrase as an optional argument (with the bat), Zhuang does not give us this option. Likewise, the verb “to give” in Zhuang does not allow for a prepositional phrase as an argument. There is no equivalent of “I gave X to Y” or “I hit X with Y” in Zhuang. This is not to say that Zhuang does not use any prepositions, but rather that many of the words that are used to express similar concepts to prepositions take the form of verbs (Luo Yongxian 2008:335). Verbs such *aeu* (to take up), *uq* (to be at), *bae* (to go), *daengz* (to arrive), *daeuj* (to come), and *dauq* (to return) are used instead of instrumental and directional prepositions. Additionally, many verbs such as *haej* (to give) already imply direction. The result is that when the direct object is moved ahead of the indirect object of an utterance, or when an optional instrument is introduced, a serial verb construction is used.

Serial Verb Constructions in Zhuang

Serial verb constructions (SVC) are strings of verbs that do not contain coordinating conjunctions such as and, or, but, yet, and for. Sentence 10 shows how the verb *aeu* (to take up) is used in relation to the verb *haej* (to give) instead of the prepositional phrase that would typically be used in English for a similar movement of the direct object.

10. nuengx aeu laex haej goq
 sister takes up gift gives older brother

11. Sister takes a gift and gives it to brother

While a similar construction is possible in English (Sentence 11), it uses the coordinating conjunction “and” between the two verbs, must provide a pronoun in the object position for

constructions, including some of the examples given above, have multiple possible implications, which can also be parsed with greater detail in the correct context.

The Use of a Null Copula (A Complete Clause without a Being Verb) in Zhuang

Another common form of Zhuang argument construction is the use of a null copula, where a state of being is expressed without the presence of a being verb. Zhuang does have verbs such as *dwg* (is) and *miz* (have) that express states of being; however, it is not unusual for them to be omitted in certain sentence constructions such as the one given in Sentence 14.

14. sam duz mu nix nding

three CL pig this red

These three pigs are red

In both Zhuang (Sentence 15) and Mandarin Chinese (Sentence 16), this null copula construction often occurs in a Topic-Comment structure (Li and Thompson 1981 and Shi Dingxu 2000).

15. mbanx de hunz lai

(Luo Yongxian 2008:347)

village that people many

that village has a lot of people

16. xiàng bízi cháng

(Li and Thompson 1981:92)

elephant nose long

elephant's nose is long

Currently, there is a good deal of discussion concerning the possible ways to categorize null-copular constructions across different linguistic boundaries, and even whether or not they can be considered verbal constructions in the first place (see Roy 2013 and Al-Horais 2006). In this dissertation, I will treat copular constructions, both stated and non-stated, as verbs requiring two arguments. This is not to ignore the current evidence being presented, but rather to acknowledge some of the complexities that Zhuang brings to this issue of copular constructions. The first is that Zhuang is a non-inflectional language, meaning that words do not change to reflect gender,

tense, or case, which are commonly used in evaluations of null-copular sentences. The second reason is that Zhuang presents certain kinds of sentences that would be ungrammatical in other languages if a copular verb was not used. Consider the grammatical Zhuang construction of “this is mine and that is yours” in Sentence 17. If a similar construction were to be used in Mandarin Chinese without the copular verb *shì* (Sentence 18), it would be ungrammatical.

17. *gaiq nix gaiq gu, gaiq de gaiq mengz* (Luo Yongxian 2008:362)
 CL⁴⁴ this CL me CL that CL you this is mine and that is yours
18. **zhège wǒde, nàge nǐde*
 this mine that yours

The third reason is that some sentence constructions in Zhuang can alternate between having or not having a being verb. Like the serial verb constructions above, relationships between the nouns and other categories of words (such as classifiers) may play a large role in whether or not the absence of a copular verb is grammatical. For example, in Sentence 15 a village is expected to have people. An additional verb is not needed to clarify this relationship even though it would not be ungrammatical to use one (Sentence 19).

19. *mbanx nix miz hunz lai*
 village this has people many

If we take this reasoning further, we could say that, in Sentence 17, the classifier provides a strong enough relationship that a verb is not needed. In a similar manner, adjectives in null-copular constructions are already in a known relationship with nouns and do not need a being verb to clarify their relationship either.

⁴⁴ This classifier is for vague items and could be translated in this sentence as “thing.”

Zhuang Determiner Phrases

In examining arguments in Zhuang, it is important to understand the construction of the Zhuang DP. Not only does this provide the structure of the primary phrase-type used to fill argument positions, it also highlights the role that the location of vocabulary in an utterance has in determining meaning in Youjiang Zhuang. The basic order of the Zhuang DP is as follows: Number—Classifier—Noun—Adjective—Determiner/Possessive. This is a strict ordering, meaning that movement cannot occur without being ungrammatical or changing the meaning of the utterance. An example of strict ordering can be seen through revisiting the null-copular construction from Sentence 14, shown again below. In Sentence 20, none of the parts of the utterance—with the exception of the determiner—can be moved without making the sentence ungrammatical. The determiner “nix” can be moved forward to the right of the noun “mu,” but this changes the meaning of the utterance from a complete, null-copular utterance to a determiner phrase that is an incomplete clause (Sentence 21). Any other positioning of “nix” in this structure would be ungrammatical.

20. sam duz mu nix nding

three CL pig this red

These three pigs are red

21. sam duz mu nding nix

three CL pig red this

These three red pigs

The change in meaning between these two utterances caused by moving the determiner demonstrates the role these affixes⁴⁵ have in setting the boundary of the DPs on their right periphery. As Luo Yongxian observes, classifiers and determiners often mark the left and right

⁴⁵ The primary determiners in Zhuang, *nix* and *de* (this and that respectively) cannot function alone. They must be bound to a classifier, a noun, or a determiner phrase.

boundaries of relative clauses (2008:367). A verb placed inside this construction, though not changing in its pronunciation, now behaves like an adjective (Sentence 22).

22. duz waiz biet nix dwg fwn

CL water buffalo run this is black The running water buffalo is black

In examining argument structure in *fien*, these boundaries are an important consideration in determining whether a given phrase is a dependent clause or an independent clause.

A final feature of the DP that is also relevant to arguments is that any single element of the DP can be omitted if there is enough contextual information. For example, the noun for house (*lanz*) is omitted from the second DP in sentence 23, because the object has already been connected with its classifier, *aen*. Since the announcement to go home is a common phrase, it does not need a classifier or a determiner, since that information is already known (Sentence 24).

23. aen lanz leiz dwg aen goq

CL house which is CL older brother Which house is older brother's?

24. goz bae lanz

I go home

In a similar manner, verbs may also omit arguments when their content is already known to those involved in a given conversation. While the most common of these arguments is the subject, since it frequently represents the topic of an ongoing discussion, this is such a strong characteristic in Zhuang that in narrative discourse, “the information chain characteristically requires only the actions to be specified” (Luo Yongxian 2008:352). However, this does not mean that we can dismiss any omitted argument as known, but rather that we will need to demonstrate a probable cause for it being known to the singers.

A Basic Structure of the Tianzhou Song Tune

Figure 3.2: A single instance of Tianzhou fien arranged by melodic iteration. In this example, there are six incomplete iterations and one closing iteration (Huang and Widman 2018). Iterations with two lines have the divisions between these lines marked with a red divider.

(yi) sau (ah-) ndi (ah) (ae -) ngoenz (ah) nix - (na laen)
pretty day this
Today is beautiful

(yi) angq (ah) sin (ah) angq - (lw -) liu (ah) sin (ah) liu (laen)
happy is happy smile is smile
Happiness is happiness A smile is a smile

(yi) mbaeuq (ah) angq (yi) lox (ah) (lw - de) gvaq (ah) miuh (laen)
Neg happy will to pass temple
(If you) aren't happy, (you) will pass the temple

mbaeuq (ah) liu (ah) lox (ah) gvaq (ah-) sauh (lw -) gvaq (ah) sauh (ah) mag (yi) (na laen)
Neg smile will to pass time to pass time fruit
(If you) don't smile, (you will) pass the time (You will) pass the time of the fruit harvest

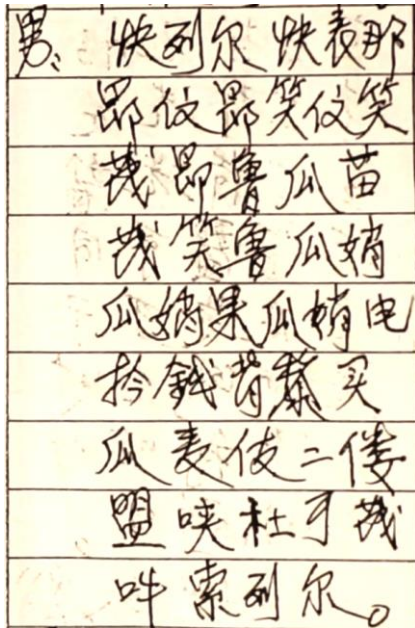
(yi) gvaq - sauh (ah) diengz (laen)
to pass time watermelon
(You will) pass the time of the watermelon harvest

gaem (ah) ciaz (yi-) bae (ah -) laez (ah) cw (ah lw -) gvaq - miah (ah) yux (ah) song (yi) lacuz (laen)
to grasp money to go where to buy to pass time lover two us
Where are (you) going to shop, clutching your money? (You are) passing the time of lovers, of the two of us

mengz (ah-) ciaz (ah) duz (ah) goj - mbaeuq - (naeuz ah soh - lae ae)
you to invite us also Neg
(If) you invite us, we will also refuse

What are the sections of the Tianzhou tune that we can use to test the hypothesis that complete utterances join with the tune at consistent points? We have already mentioned two points of the tune that could be considered a “syntactic pause” (Lord 1960:32) in the melody.

Figure 3.3: The instance of fien from Figure 3.2 written out by line. There are more lines than melodic iterations because some iterations contain two lines of text (Huang 2018a).



Since the Tianzhou tune is made up of a cycled incomplete iteration and a closing iteration, the end of each iteration is a clear point to consider in the overall structure (Figure 3.2). In

performances of fien, there is a pause of a few seconds at the end of each iteration, where one of the performers will say what lines will be sung next. The second pause is at the end of the entire instance of fien after the closing iteration. This is the point where singers will either start a new strophe or, in antiphonal singing, where the next groups will start their strophe. However, Zhuang singers do not mark individual iterations of singing when they write out their lyrics. The primary divisions in Zhuang lyrics are made by completed

instances of fien, by individual lines of text, and by standardized opening and closing phrases, which have their own lines in the text (Figure 3.3). Since some iterations of Tianzhou fien contain two lines of text, it is important to find the internal portions of the melody that join with these lines. This involves analyzing the melodic frame of Tianzhou fien for the stable elements that make up the frame and contrasting them with elements that are allowed to vary.

This process of analyzing Tianzhou fien will draw from two primary sources. The first of these sources is the literature on analyzing strophic songs, particularly those focused on the music of East and Southeast Asia. In order to demonstrate the degree of variation present in different parts of the traditional tune, I present some tune sections and iterations as multiple transcriptions from different performances aligned with each other in a vertical configuration. Similar methods to this can be seen in Constantine Brăiloiu’s studies of European folk songs

(1984), Bell Yung’s analysis of Cantonese opera arias (1989), and Schimmelpenninck’s 1997 monograph on Jiangsu shan’ge. To further simplify this process, I combine transcriptions where possible and only show relevant variations that occur at given sections of the melody. A similar approach is taken by Marie-Pierre Lissoir in her “paradigmatic analysis” of Tai Dam singing (2014).

The second source informing my analysis is the Generative Theory of Tonal Music (GTTM) put forward by Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff (1983). While there are parts of my analysis that diverge from GTTM, there are some key principles that are present. Similar to time-span and prolongational reduction, I identify basic units of melody and select the “most important event” in these musical events as the unit’s head (Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983:120). This will be used to facilitate description of the basic form of the Tianzhou song tune. The more stable parts of iterations will be considered heads of larger melodic sections. While there are no bass notes or other types of harmonic cues to indicate significant notes and sections, the use of non-lexical words (vocables) and lexical content will be considered in determining structurally significant points of the melody.

Defining the Frame of the Tianzhou Tune

The Tianzhou tune, like vast majority of Zhuang music, is based on a pentatonic pitch set.

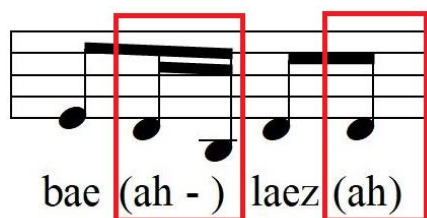
Figure 3.4: A map of intervals used in fien.



Though the relative distance between the notes is consistent, the frequencies of the notes vary between singers. From a Western perspective, we could say that it is not uncommon for different groups of Zhuang to sing the same tune to each other in different keys. For the purpose of comparison however, all of the analyses in this chapter will use the same set of five

pitches (Figure 3.4).⁴⁶ I have heard some singers flatten the 3rd note in this pitch set (here given as an E); however, at the present writing, this appears to be associated with the way groups of singers sing the tune and not with the topic being sung or the mood that might be projected in the lyrics. Of these five pitches, the middle three are sung the most. The lowest note often begins iterations, but after that it is typically used for ornaments; the highest note is primarily used as an ornament, and rarely takes a rhythmic value longer than an eighth-note (a half of a beat/pulse).

Figure 3.5: The configuration of lexical and non-lexical syllables (vocables) with small units of melody.



Though shan'ge is frequently characterized as having free rhythmic characteristics, the accents of the Tianzhou tune are evenly spaced. The pulses of the rhythm align with the syllables of the lyrics; vocables joining with lyrics occur on the off-beat half of these pulses (see figure 3.5). Ornaments occur most often on the second half of the beat with the

vocables, but can also occur on the first half of the beat with the lyrics. Individual notes are not longer than a single pulse, unless they represent a major division or ending of an iteration. These longer notes usually occur with vocables that mark these divisions, but in some areas can correlate with the last syllable of a given line when that line is the first in a two-line iteration.

Because a given line can contain five to nine syllables (and on rare occasions as few as three, or

Figure 3.6: An example of similarities between melodic units of fien



as many as eleven), and because there can be either one or two lines in a given iteration, the number of beats in a given iteration changes with repetition. This relationship between pulses and each syllable with its corresponding vocable represents a basic melodic unit for Tianzhou fien. Further

⁴⁶ For the sake of correct intervals, all transcriptions should be read as being in treble clef.

Figure 3.7: Categories of melodic units used in Tianzhou fien.



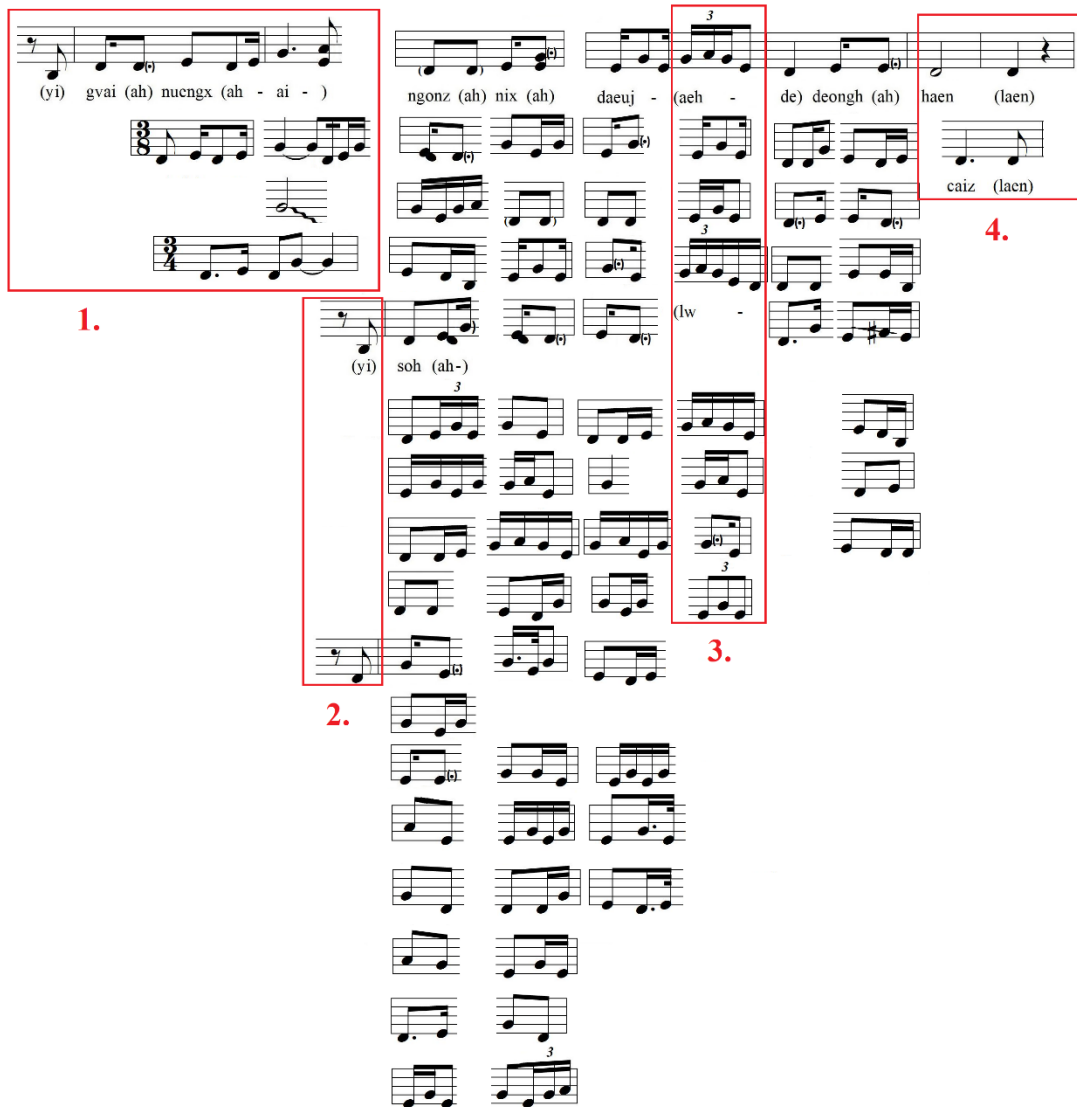
analysis of the transcriptions used for this chapter supports this assumption. In all of the songs analyzed—which included more than 2500 syllables—there are only eighty-seven unique melodic units. These melodic units have very similar shapes to each other as demonstrated in Figure 3.6, where all seven of the melodic units shown are headed by E, move in the same direction, and have the same interval between the first and final notes.⁴⁷ In this case, the unit on the far left of the figure is a natural reduction of the more

elaborate examples. If a similar process is followed for the remaining melodic units, they can be organized into nineteen categories, with sixteen of those headed by D, E, or G (Figure 3.7).

⁴⁷ Since the most stable parts of the melodic units are those that join with lexical content, I considered either the start of the unit, or the longest part of the unit joining to lexical content, the head of a given melodic unit.

These units are put together to form the overall shape of the frame which begins at a B or D, rises to the G in the middle,⁴⁸ and descends back down to D in a given incomplete iteration. For the final iteration, the tune finishes on G. The beginning and end of the frame have the least amount of variation. This lower degree of variation can be seen in Figure 3.8, where the

Figure 3.8: Points of stability and variation in eighty single-line iterations of *fien*. The figure reads from left to right with the top representing a full iteration with some minor variations and the melodic units below showing where other iterations differ structurally. The points in the top iteration with the most melodic units below them are the points where there was the greatest amount of difference between the iterations that were analyzed.



⁴⁸ Most of the time this is a melodic unit headed by G, but it can also be a melodic unit that includes G.

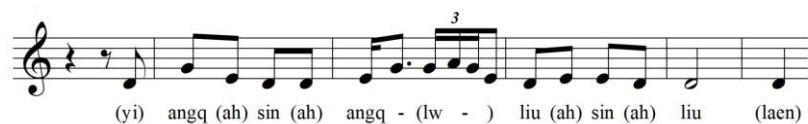
beginnings and ends are marked by Boxes 1, 2, and 4. Most of the iterations start with B and move to a unit headed by D. Iterations that start with D are usually followed by a unit headed by G. Incomplete iterations typically have a unit headed by E before settling to D. In single-line iterations like the ones used for Figure 3.8, the melodic units between the beginning and the middle have the highest degree of variation (the middle is marked by Box 3), both in terms of which unit types are used, and how they combine. In two-line iterations, the basic structure is the same, but there is also more variation between the middle and end because of the additional line. In these sections with more variation, there are a couple of trends that influence the direction of the melody. The first is a tendency to avoid too much repetition. Melodic units do not normally repeat adjacent to each other, and even the rhythmic patterns of these units are not usually repeated beyond three beats.

Figure 3.9: Tones of the Youjiang Zhuang language. The numeric tone values are from *Zhuangyu tongyongci yu fangyan daibiaodian cihui duizhao huibian* 1998:671.

Tone Markers for Open Syllables	Numeric Tone Value	Pitch Contour	Vowel Lengths and Closed syllables	Numeric Tone Value	Pitch Contour
unmarked	13	rising	short vowel with p, t, k	55	high level
z	31	falling	long vowel with p, t, k	45	high rising
j	45	high rising	short vowel with b, d, g	31	falling
x	44	mid-high level	long vowel with b, d, g	22	low level
q	35	mid-high rising			
h	33	middle level			

Another major influencing factor in how the more variable sections of the tune are arranged appears to be the tones in the Youjiang Zhuang language (Figure 3.9). While the overall pattern of the melodic frame used for an incomplete iteration is to ascend to G and move back down to D, it is possible for the top note, G, to be reached once or even twice on either side of the center of the iteration. These additional peaks in the melody correlate most often with high tones such as j, q, x, t, p, and k (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10: An example of high pitch contour correlation with higher melodic units in fien (Huang and Widman 2018).



These higher linguistic tones are also much more likely to be in units that are headed by G or in units with more melismatic ornamentation that pass through G or A. The descending tone, z, low level tone h, and words that end in d, b, and g are much more likely to appear in units headed by B, D, and E (3.11). This is not to say that the tendency of higher melodic units to join with higher linguistic tones and lower units to join with lower tones is a hard rule. When there are strings of high or low tones, there is still variation in the melodic units that are used. Rather, if there is a mixed group of low and high linguistic tones, the higher tone will generally pair with the higher melodic unit. Furthermore, the melodic units at the beginning, middle, and end will still retain their positions, securing the frame of Tianzhou fien.

Figure 3.11: Lower pitches correlating with lower melodic units (Li Xiaoyang 2012).



Vocables and Melodic Structure in Tianzhou Fien

As mentioned above, vocables will be treated as part of the melodic structure. Although they do not have lexical meaning, vocables do occur with melodic ornaments, and at major structural points in the song tune. While there are very few descriptions that cover 100% of vocable occurrences, there are some general rules. Ornamental vocables are not required on any specific syllable and occur at the discretion of the singer. These are the vocables that typically confuse younger listeners, since they break up the flow between individual words and the syllables of

larger words. Structural vocables (see Examples 26-30 below) vary in their consistency depending on where they are in relation to each line of lyrics.

25. **(yi)** OOOOO **(na laen)**

26. OOO **(lw de)** OO (laen)

27. OOOOO **(lw)** OOOOO (laen)

28. OOO (lw) OO **(na)** OOOOO (laen)

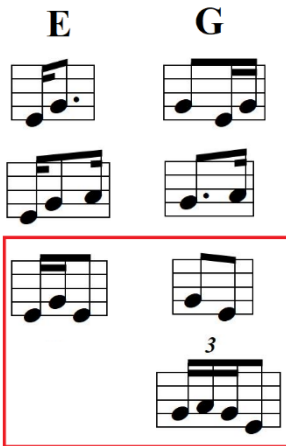
29. OOOOO **(XXXX ae)**

Many iterations begin with the vocable (yi), and nearly every iteration will close with the vocable (laen) or (na laen) (Example 26). In single-line iterations, a two-syllable vocable (lw de) is frequently placed before the penultimate syllable (Example 27). In two-line iterations, there is a vocable that occurs in-between lines, (lw) (Example 28).⁴⁹ This vocable occurs with virtually every iteration in some areas, but might be optional or possibly even absent in other places.

There is another vocable (na) that occurs when adding an additional line to one that contains the (lw de) vocable (Example 29). The vocable that closes a final iteration of fien, (ae), is essential and is never left out, unless by mistake (Example 30). It often accompanies a stock phrase made up of two lexical words and two vocables, a characteristic which will be discussed more below. This final vocable also ends on a held G.

⁴⁹ The vocables discussed here, especially (lw)—and by extension, (lw de)—have a number of alternate forms such as (aeh), (loh), and (nw).

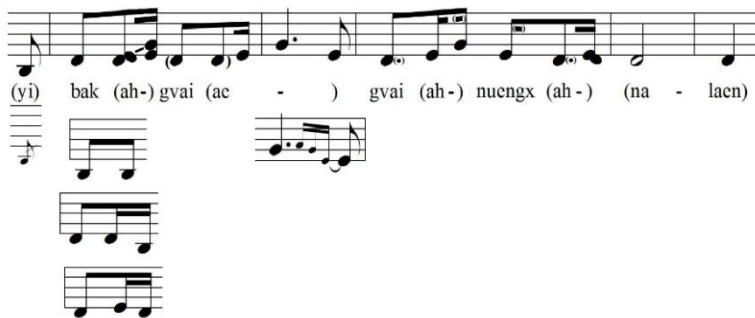
Figure 3.12: Categories of melodic units used in the middle of iterations. Units used for both (lw) and (lw de) are marked.



The number of possible melodic units correlating with these structural vocables is lower than with other positions in a given iteration. For the vocables at the beginning and end of iterations, the pitch and rhythm options are limited to two notes for (yi) and one note for (ae). The more variable middle vocables, (lw) and (lw de), limit themselves to melodic units that are either headed by G or that reach from E to G (Figure 3.12). The (lw de) construction is even narrower, taking only units that allow a stepwise connection between the last note of the melodic unit of (lw) and the melodic unit of (de), which is always headed by D. While it is possible not to have a

structural vocable in the middle of a given iteration, it is important to note that, when a vocable is absent at this position, the middle of the tune is still highlighted by a longer pause on the G.

Figure 3.13: The twenty-six ornamental opening iterations used in this sample. As with Figure 3.8, instead of showing all twenty-six iterations, I show one iteration at the top with some minor variations and the melodic units that represent points of difference below at the points where they occur.



In addition to ornamental vocables and structural vocables, there are also meaning-bearing phrases that function in some ways like extended vocables and in other ways that are more reflective of the of lexical meaning of the words used. These phrases typically occur in three areas of the tune: the first iteration, as an accent to one or two sung iterations in a strophe of fien, and after the lyrics of the closing iteration. The melody and lyrics used are much more rigid than

other parts of the Tianzhou tune, though there is still a degree of flexibility, which is shown in the transcription of the opening iteration in Figure 3.13. The iterations that open an instance of *fien* typically either have lyrics similar to those in the transcription above (which translates to “mouth is clever, cousin is clever”) or more often those shown in Sentence 30.

30. saundi (ah) ngoenz nix⁵⁰
 beautiful day this

While they do serve the purpose of forming an opening address, are frequently used to open strophes, and are even included in Huang Wenke’s collection of written lyrics, these phrases are sometimes omitted. In many cases, they can also be exchanged for each other. This is indeed the case for the strophe in Figure 3.2, where Huang and I sang a set of lyrics and vocables that were different than what he wrote (Figure 3.3), but that served the same purpose.

Figure 3.14: A type of phrase used to accent iterations. The text of this phrase, *gah laix*, means “really!” or “truly!”

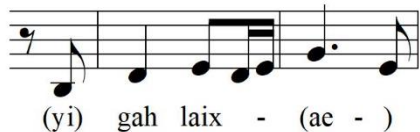
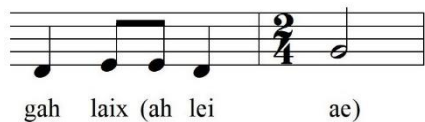


Figure 3.15: The type of phrase used to finish final iterations of a strophe of *fien*.



The second type of phrase typically occurs before an iteration the singer wants to draw attention to and usually has the same shape and lyrics shown in Figure 3.14. Other alternate lyrics include phrases translated as “brothers and sisters!” and “clever cousin!” Though this type is used in

most instances of *fien*, they are more often left out than the other two discussed in this section. The final type of phrase finishes an entire utterance of *fien* (Figure 3.15). These

phrases each contain two lexical syllables and two vocables

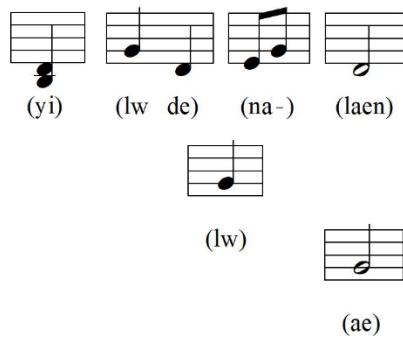
permitting short words and phrases such as *ngoenznix* (today), *cam mengz* (ask you), and *naeuz*

⁵⁰ The word order of these opening phrases is often different than in daily speech, where even in copular constructions the adjective follows the noun. The arrangement of these stock phrases will be discussed more in the following chapter.

so (speaking honestly). Since these words do not always directly reference what is being sung, it is not uncommon for them to be replaced by lyrics in a line that uses seven syllables instead of five, reserving only the last two notes for vocables.

The association of structural vocables and stock phrases with more stable sections of *fien* indicates note values that mark consistent points of division in iterations (Figure 3.16). The vocable (yi) corresponds with B or D at the beginning of iterations and stock phrases. (Lw de) and (lw) correlate with the peak of the melodic progression (on the note G) in one- and two-line

Figure 3.16: Vocable-note combinations that mark key sections of *fien* iterations.



iterations respectively. The vocable (na) is similar to (lw). Its shape matches the subset of melodic units that join with lw and start on E, and it also occurs between two lines. Though it adds an additional line to an iteration having the vocable (lw de) in the first half, (na) will be treated as being a subcategory of (lw) because of its function, shape and position in its iteration. Finally, the ends of incomplete iterations are marked

with (laen) or (na laen), which occurs on a D; and the ends of finishing iterations are marked with (ae), which occurs on a G. Because of the consistency of these occurrences, these structural vocables will be considered acceptable substitutes for their melodic counterparts as we move to evaluate the ability of sections headed by them to combine with lyrics.

Evaluating Where the Melodic and Syntactic Structures Meet

In syntax, the exploration of the way that structures group together to form larger structures is often discussed in relation to constituency. A constituent can be defined as “group of words that function together as a unit” (Carnie 2013:73) or as “a string that speakers can manipulate as a

single chunk” (Sportiche, Koopman, and Stabler 2014:47). Especially with the latter definition, constituency can cover a few different linguistic categories. Groups of phonemes and morphemes can be treated and manipulated as “single chunks” that can be exchanged for each other. In syntax, constituency is most commonly discussed in the evaluation of what kinds of words can be grouped into phrases. In the first section of this chapter, the discussion of argument positions in relation to sentence completeness represents one way of evaluating the constituency of a sentence.

While constituency is referred to in some ethnomusicological and musicological discussions, it does not have the same degree of consistent meanings or widespread use as the term does in linguistics. Despite this, there have still been attempts to describe categories of musical arrangements that combine hierarchically. Charles Seeger’s *museme*, “a complete independent unit of music-logical form or mood” (1977b:76), represents a minimal extension of a musical form, which combines with other *musemes* to create musical units of medial (e.g. a phrase) and maximal (e.g. a work) extension. After Seeger, Philip Tagg would later popularize the *museme* as “minimal units of expression in any given musical style” (1982:48), showing how they could combine into initial and closing motifs that would comprise the musical phrase.⁵¹ GTTM uses grouping structure as a primary means of “reflecting perceived hierarchies” (Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1986:13) of motives in themes, themes in theme-groups, theme-groups in sections, and sections in a given piece. Finally, Michael Tenzer’s efforts to define the structures of musical genres from different cultures under the term “periodicity” represent the most recent attempts at describing the ways music can be hierarchically grouped (2006).

⁵¹ This arrangement of musical constituencies, in addition to drawing terminology from the work of Charles Seeger, is also similar to the work of Sundberg and Lindblom on generative music description (1976).

In my evaluation of the melody of Tianzhou fien above, I focus on how melodic units are grouped into sections marked by vocables, which are grouped into iterations, which are grouped into strophes. I delineate these tiers of constituency for the purpose of evaluating their ability to combine with lyric constituents to form phrases that combine the melodic with the linguistic. In this final section, I will first discuss groups of lyrics that combine with melodic constituencies at the levels of melodic units, divisions of single-line iterations, and with the parts of the melody that join with full lines of text. I will then address potential exceptions to my assertion that identifiable sections of the melody consistently merge with complete clauses. Lastly, I will finish my analysis with a discussion of groups of lyrics that combine with the melody at the level of a strophe.

The Relationship between Melodic Units and Meaning-Bearing Syllables

The connection between melodic units and meaning-bearing syllables has already been examined in this chapter, since the structure of the melody is closely connected to the syllables in each line. With each melodic unit being tied to either a meaning-bearing syllable and its ornamental vocable or a structural vocable, the length of a given iteration is determined by the number of syllables in the line. At the level of melodic units there is a correlation between linguistic tone and the pitch material sung, though this is best realized in a position allowing for variation and in the context of tones with different pitch levels. It is unlikely that we could claim that the melody is generated by the tones as in Cantonese opera (Yung 1983). Rather, this finding is similar to claims made regarding Zhuang in other areas of Guangxi (Mark and Li 1966), and in other parts of the world, that “music accommodates language when it is convenient but is perfectly willing and able to override linguistic requirements” (Schellenberg 2012:266). This

dominance of music over linguistic tones is most clearly seen in the limited variation at the start, middle, and especially the ending of each iteration. Finally, there is no relationship between the syntactic categories of these words and the melodic units they pair with.

The Relationship between Lyrics and The Structural Vocable (Lw De)

Moving out further, we address the divisions present in single-line iterations of fien. In the sample of 350 iterations of fien, approximately 170 of them contain a single line of lyrics. Of these, thirty are standard opening lines of fien and forty are final iterations. The remaining hundred occur in the main body of strophes of fien alternating with each other and with two-line iterations. Of these iterations, all but five have the vocable (lw de) before the final two syllables, providing a natural point of division in single-line structures. The relationship between music and grammatical phrases at this level is, for the most part, arbitrary. While there are cases where the content on both sides of the vocable could be construed as being complete sentences (the serial verbs in Example 31 could potentially be seen as being complete individually with an understood subject), most lines containing (lw de) show that it does not consistently align with complete clauses. (Lw de) can separate arguments from verbs (Example 32), negatives from verbs (Example 33), and adjectives from nouns (Example 34).

31. ngoenz nix daeuj (**ah de**) doengh bung (**laen**) (Xiao Yang 2012)

day this come together meet

32. cim mag cim (**lw de**) giq gaenq (**laen**) (Huang Wenke 2018)

inspect fruit inspect CL stem (I) inspect the fruit (and) inspect the stem

33. miah nix mbaeuq (**lw de**) gueg liu (**laen**) (Huang Wenke 2018)

time this Neg do leisure activity Now (you) don't do leisure

34. naeuz aen mbanx (**lw de**) zingq zang (**laen**) (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018)
 speak of CL village central (I) speak of (the) central village

These divisions represent the separation of overt phrase constituents that make up the sentences in the lyrics. In Example 33 (*lw de*) separates the verb *gueg* (to do) from the negative *mbaeuq* that represents a break in the sentence structure. Furthermore, if *gueg liu* were removed from Example 33, the sentence would be without both a verb and an object. Conversely, though *doengh buengz* (together meet) is in a subordinate relationship with the verb *daeuj* (to come), both of these constructions are complete without the other when combined with the null subject and have roughly the same meaning in the context of *fien*. Finally, despite (*lw de*) separating constituents that make up a sentence, individual words are, in all cases but one, not broken up by (*lw de*). However, this could have more to do with the monosyllabic nature of most Zhuang words rather than being a reflection of convention.

The Relationship between Lyrics and Sections of Melody-Marking Lines

These breaks in sentence structure change drastically once we move to the level of single- and double-line constructions. Lines consistently occur between the boundaries of the beginning of the melody and the final vocable (*laen*) for single-line iterations and are consistently separated at the line division in the middle of the melody by the vocable (*lw*) in double-line constructions. Of the over five hundred lines used in the data sample for this chapter, only six present a possible challenge to the assertion that lines in *fien* are complete sentences. These will be discussed below. All of the other lines bounded by either (*lw*) or (*laen*) have complete argument structures similar to what has been discussed above, including both overt and covert subject arguments.

Looking at Example 35, the difference between how the grammatical structure in a given line corresponds with the vocable (lw de) and vocables marking the ends of lines ([lw] or [laen]) is clear. If (lw de) is analyzed as part of the grammatical structure, the verb *ok* (to move out) is separated from the subject *coiq* (a first-person pronoun).⁵² While it is possible in the right context for *ok lanz* (out of the house) to occur with a null subject, its separation from the known subject *coiq* is another example of (lw de) dividing constituents that make sentences. However, when examined at the level of a line demarcated by the start of the melody and the vocable (laen), the sentence is complete.

35. haet nix coiq (**lw de**) ok lanz (**laen**) (Li Xiaoyang 2012)
 morning this I go out house This morning I come out⁵³ of the house
36. coiq lwg bux (**aeh de**) banhbiengz (**laen**) (Xiao Yang 2012)
 I CL CL wanderer I am a wandering child

Example 36 provides another example of the difference between structural vocables (lw de) and (laen), this time with a null copula construction. In this example, the variant vocable (aeh de) separates the classifiers for child (*lwg*) and human (*bux*) from the noun that is needed to specify what kind of person the singer is claiming to be. Neither *coiq lwg bux* (I am classifier for child, classifier for person) nor *banhbiengz* (wanderer) can stand on their own. However, if (aeh de) is ignored, the line is acceptable as a complete sentence with a null copula. (Lw de), then, is more of a marker of the peak of the melodic structure in a given single-line iteration, while (laen)

⁵² Literally, *coiq* means slave; however, it is frequently used as a form of self-address, especially when speaking to someone who is more important.

⁵³ The mixing of “come” and “go” with out is deliberate in this translation to reflect that the verb *ok* references movement outward, but does not specify direction toward or away from the speaker. The translation “to move out” was not used because of different meaning of the typical colloquial usage in English.

correlates with both the end of the melody and with the end of a line, and in these cases, the end of a sentence.

When the melody expands to cover two lines, the vocable (lw) also marks the boundary of a line. Like (lw de), (lw) also marks the peak of the melodic structure. However, unlike the (lw de) construction, (lw) never divides individual lines. Furthermore, divisions between verbs and objects, classifiers and nouns, and negatives and verbs do not occur with (lw). This integrity of sentence structure in phrases bounded by (lw) and (laen) extends to question, topic-comment, and short serial verb constructions. Almost all of the lines in these iterations are complete sentences. Two-line iterations, then, are not a means to extend the length of complete clauses; this is done by increasing the length of the line. In the data sample, most two-line iterations feature sentences with both a structural relationship and a rhyme between the two lines. In Example 37, there is a rhyme is between *deq* and *meh*, and the second line is an answer to the question asked in the first line of the iteration.

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 37. bux laez cwj caeuz | deq (lw) | (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018) |
| CL who cook dinner | wait | Who will cook dinner and wait |
| meh geq nuengx mbaeuq miz | (laen) | |
| mother old sister | Neg have | Sister does not have an old mother |

Some of these two-line constructions only have one apparent relationship correlating with their appearance in the same melodic structure. Example 38 does not have a rhyme between the two lines in the iteration, but the meanings and structures are parallel to each other.

- | | | |
|---|--------------|--|
| 38. gvan ⁵⁴ bi fwngz daeuj zuq | (lw) | (Xiao Chang 2003) |
| husband wave hand | come nothing | Husband waves hand (and) nothing comes |

⁵⁴ Here, the word for husband is used as a first-person pronoun instead of a noun describing an actual social relationship.

goq bi fwngz daeuj ndiai (laen)

older brother wave hand come nothing Brother waves hand (and) nothing comes

On the other hand, Example 39 has two lines that are more closely related to lines in adjacent iterations. The first line borrows its subject from the previous iteration.

39. la ngoenz ndi cux **baex** (lw) (Xiao Yang 2012)

find day good receive son's wife (The priest) finds a good day to receive the bride

caz **laex** lamz daeb lamz (laen)

tea gift basket pile (on) basket Gift baskets of tea are stacked on each other

The second line is parallel in form and has a similar meaning to the first line of the following iteration. Here it is the rhyme of *baex* with *laex* that likely results in the joining of these two lines into one iteration.

Shared subjects and relationships between iterations in a manner similar to Example 40 are not uncommon. Relationships occurring across iterations can go beyond rhymes, parallelisms, and answers to questions, extending to conditional clauses and longer serial verb constructions. While smaller serial verb constructions occur within the boundaries of a single line, larger constructions that can maintain completeness through multiple iterations are also used. To understand how this works, it helpful to examine how serial verb constructions can maintain completeness across lines.

40. buen buzfaenj (lw de) lox dai (na) (Liao, Lu, Ou, and Huang 2018)

exchange heroin will die Exchanging heroin will lead to death

daengz cauxyah buxsai (laen)

arrive to woman man Applying to women and men

In Example 40, the verb *daengz* (to arrive) is complete because its subject is understood from the previous line. However, unlike previous examples of this phenomenon, the subject is the entire utterance of the previous line. The closest equivalent of this phenomenon can be seen in the substitution of the determiner “this” for the first sentence in Example 41.

41. Selling heroin will lead to death.

This applies to both women and men.

As mentioned above, this process of extended serial verbs occurs not only across lines but also across iterations. Example 42 shows a short string of phrases created with a serial verb construction where each occurrence of the verb *baenz* (to achieve) shares its subject and object with *deq* (to wait). This construction occurs across four lines and two two-line iterations. The first is an iteration with a (lw de)-type vocable joined to a second line by the vocable (na). The second has two lines with a (lw)-type vocable in the middle with a rhyme between *goq* (older brother) and *lox* (to know).

42. deq	baenz	ciuh	(aeh de)	lwg lan	(na)	(Xiao Yang 2012)
wait	achieve	life		CL	grandchild	(I) wait achieving a grandparent’s age
baenz	lot	hah		vi	gvan ⁵⁵	(laen)
achieve	losing	engagement	for you			Achieving losing engagements for you
baenz	lot	gvan	vi	<u>goq</u>	(loh)	
achieve	losing	husband	for older brother			Achieving losing a husband for you
mbaeuq	<u>lox</u>	muengh	bux laez	(laen)		
Neg	know to hope	CL	what			(I) don’t know who to hope for

⁵⁵ *Gvan*, the word for husband, has two uses here: the first is as a second-person pronoun referring to the male singers, and the second as its literal meaning.

These types of serial constructions do not pose a challenge for the assertion above that lines can be considered complete utterances, since each subsequent line after the first in this construction is complete due to a shared subject.

Potential Exceptions to the Correspondence between Complete Clauses and Lines

However, although the variety of complete sentences and constructions represent nearly all of the kinds of lines that occur in the sample, there are still six potential counter examples that need to be considered. The first of these is the conditional sentence in Example 43. Though the argument structure of the verb *ndaex* (to obtain) has both a subject and an object, the conditional *saepsaet* (although) requires an additional sentence to join to it for the utterance to be complete.

43. saepsaet oix **(lo de)** ndaex ngaenz **(laen)** (Untitled Video 2018)

although sugar cane obtain money

In the strophe containing Example 43, this required sentence is provided in the first line of the following iteration. A similar case to this does not have a verb at all. *Ngoenznix* (today) in Example 44 is found in two opening lines. While it lacks a verb and object like the conditional above, it still must join to a complete utterance. While it would be tempting to dismiss this second example as an anomaly, it is not uncommon in song contests and other public performances for the singer to announce the current year as an entire line (Example 45) that also joins to a complete sentence.

44. **(gvai lae ae)** ngoenz nix **(na laen)**

day this

45. ngi lingz it biet bi **(laen)**

two zero one eight year

While these latter two examples appear to contradict the initial assertion in this chapter, that sentences join to iterations, they may actually represent an important addition to the first part of the hypothesis rather than a contradiction. All three of these examples occur inside incomplete iterations that must be followed by either another incomplete iteration or a finishing iteration. In this case, we could say that the requirements of the phrase structure in these cases match the requirements of the iteration structure.

A fourth potential exception is shown in Example 46. Here, the verb *doeksig* (to have affection for) requires an object to be complete, but the object is not given until the second line.

46. *doeksig* *daemj doeksig (nw)* (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018)
 to have affection for to reach to have affection for I have much affection for
 doeksig *giq va hau*
 to have affection for CL flower white I have affection for the white flower

While this example is not like the previous three, which must join to complete clauses, there are two points to consider when regarding this exception. First, the upper line is a serial verb construction that is used to heighten the degree of the verb *doeksig*; second, the verb is used a third time to begin the following line, so that the object is not separated from the main verb by the major sections of melody.

The final two potential exceptions to the hypothesis stated above are both lines without verbs and, while they are preceded and followed by complete sentences, do not have the same required relationship to a complete clause as the times given above.

47. *fien nangz lix uq gvih (lw)* (Huang Wenke 2018)
 fien woman still is in cabinet My fien is still in a cabinet

bak ngi aen yoegciaz (**laen**)

hundred twenty CL key

(Having) one hundred twenty keys

The two lines in Example 47 give the first of these examples, describing the singer's songs being in a cabinet that requires one hundred twenty keys to open. There are three different ways these two lines could be interpreted. The first is that the second line is an extended genitive phrase modifying the cabinet. In this case, the complete clause is broken into two lines because its length is exceptionally long. While this is possible, the Zhuang do not typically extend the right periphery of noun phrases with lengthy adjectives or genitive/possessive DPs. Another explanation is that the copular verb *miz* (to have) is covert at the beginning of the second line. This would reflect the intuitions of my language informants, who indicated that *miz* would normally occur between *gvih* (cabinet) and *bak* (hundred). The third way this relationship could be interpreted is as one that is not grammatical. This is not to say that an error is committed; rather, that certain benefits in rhyme or content might be more important than the alignment of complete clauses with lines, and by extension the melodic structure of *fien*. Example 48 presents us with a similar span of explanations.

48. gij baiz gij (**lo de**) goq liz (**laen**)

(Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018)

few line few CL banyan

A few lines of banyan trees

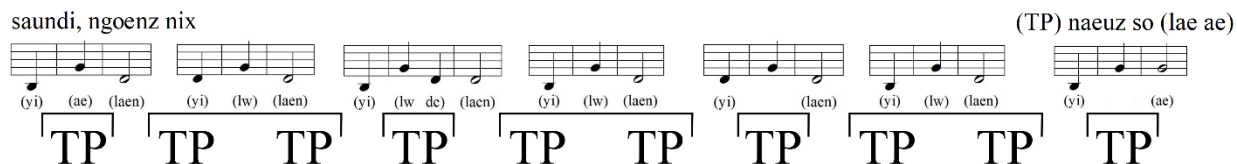
The phrase could simply be a DP that is parallel to the complete sentence in the following line “A few banyan trees are next to the village” (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018). Like Example 47, this construction could also be interpreted as having *miz* at the beginning of the line, especially since it does not have any overt conjunctions joining it to the sentences before or after it. The final possibility is that this construction is not normally considered acceptable, but is used in this case because of personal inclination or other structural priorities. It is also possible that

both of these constructions would not normally be used by other singers, but this assertion would need to be tested further.

The Relationship between Lyrics and Melody at the Level of the Strophe

Regardless of whether last two potential exceptions are or are not complete, or whether or not a lack of completeness would be considered ungrammatical, all utterances must be complete by the end of a given strophe. The strophe is usually bounded by a stock opening line such as *saundi ngoenznix* (today is a beautiful day) and a stock word-vocable combination sung after the last line of the strophe (Figure 3.17). However, the stock opening phrases are occasionally left out, or more often exchanged for openings that are customized by the singers for a particular set of

Figure 3.17: A condensed transcription of the strophe in Figure 3.2 showing the relationship between complete sentences (TP), iterations (transcribed using pitches corresponding with structural vocables), and the boundaries of the strophe.



strophes.⁵⁶ The stock phrases used at the end are also sometimes replaced by content specific to that strophe, while still ending on the vocable (ae) when the strophe is completed. Despite these minor differences, the forty completed strophes of *fien* that make up the sample used for this study would look similar to Figure 3.16 if we were to transcribe them in a similar way. This one example covers most of the different reduced configurations of structural vocables and combinations of TPs⁵⁷ with iterations. Even the four strophes that have lines that are DPs (the

⁵⁶ This particular feature will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

⁵⁷ A TP or tense phrase is one way of referring to a sentence constituent in syntax.

two that must join to a complete sentence, and the final two examples discussed above) would not create much of a difference, since the rest of the lines in those instances of *fien* are all TPs. Since three of these DPs are directly connected to adjacent TPs, there are no open arguments or stranded phrases in these strophes. The remaining DP in Example 48 has a topical relationship to the TPs that follow it, strengthening the possibility that it may be a null expression of being.

Examining *fien* at this level offers another explanation for two opening lines discussed above that contain only vocables and the lyrics *ngoenznix* (today). While the significance of the requirement of joining to a complete utterance has already been mentioned, another aspect of these lines that is important is their role as lyrical parentheses marking the overall boundary of the strophe. *Ngoenznix* is used both at the beginning and at the end of strophes of *fien* and often functions more as a vocable than a phrase that contributes significantly to the lyrics of the strophe. If we assume these stock phrases to function more as vocables than as lexically-driven phrases, the reduction from *saundi ngoenznix* (today is beautiful) to *ngoennix* (today) is not in conflict with our initial assumption that iterations join to complete clauses; both these stock phrases and their joining iterations are in a different category altogether because of their relationship with the strophe.

Moreover, the function of stock phrases for marking the start and end of a given strophe indicates another correlation between melody and lyrics beyond what has been discussed up to the present. We have already mentioned that a given utterance of *fien* consists of a sequence of incomplete iterations of the melody that finish with a completed iteration. Melodically, these complete and incomplete iterations combine to make a larger musical constituent. In the same way, a strophe is not made up of a single, simple complete clause, but of multiple clauses that are either on a single topic or on topics that are related to each other. At the strophe level, then, the

lyrics are best categorized as some kind of unit of discourse. The correlation of a completed set of iterations with a unit of discourse is a distinct constituent from what has been previously discussed in this chapter. Simple complete clauses correspond with lines, which correspond with either melodic iterations of fien or sections of these iterations. However, only one of these smaller clauses is too small to correspond with the structure of the strophe, even when all arguments are resolved. Conversely, larger parallel and serial constructions are frequently too large for iterations and do not consistently start or end at the same major sections in two-line iterations. In other words, the overall structure of an utterance of fien likely has two constituencies involving correlations of clauses and the Tianzhou tune, one for the correspondence between a complete clause and major points of iterations and one for a completed set of iterations with a completed unit of discourse.

Conclusion

While the songs I analyze provide support for my hypothesis, I was not able to adequately test non-grammatical combinations of melody and lyrics during the course of my fieldwork. There were a few different factors that contributed to this absence of data. First, most Zhuang do not discuss their language or music using academic terminology. Many of the words that are used to describe different parts of fien can have a wider range of meanings than they would in their English counterparts (this will be discussed later in Chapter 5). Additionally, Zhuang are not accustomed to analyzing their music or teaching it in stages as we do in the West. They learn by listening to and imitating more experienced singers. Another factor was the expectation among singers that I should be fluent in Zhuang before learning how to sing. While this changed slightly after a video of me singing went viral on Chinese social media, the primary way singers were

willing to teach me was by allowing me to sing along with them. They were not as interested in my questions as they were having me sing along with them or sing the lines they had given me. These factors combined made it very difficult for me to assemble a reliable list of sample lines and contexts to deploy them.

At the same time, though, I found that many of my questions about what could or could not be done with melodic structure, where vocables were placed, and the relationships of these features with each other could be found in the VCD and field recordings I collected. While this analysis of 500 lines is only the equivalent of a two-VCD set, the number and variety of singers, locations, and lyrics are enough to provide a basic evaluation of my hypothesis to lay the groundwork for future research. Even with the few exceptions found in these lines, the level of correlation of complete sentences with iterations of *fién* supports the idea of structural correspondence between sections of the traditional melody and complete clauses. Whether or not this correlation can be considered related to possible worlds will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FIEN AS A FORM OF ORAL LITERATURE

The second part of my hypothesis asserts that the correlation between iterations of the *fien* melody and complete clauses of song lyrics is a structural indication that the melody represents an audible marker of the possible world of Zhuang oral literature. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, possible worlds address how humans can make statements about fiction, guesses, beliefs, and perceived reality without creating non-sensical sentences. These categories just mentioned are said to represent different worlds because the guesses and fictions we speak of often portray a world that is different from what we think it is or a world that is just one of many ways the world could be (Lewis 1986). Structurally, statements such as “in the world of X” are similar to the iterations in *fien*, since they also join to complete sentences. Furthermore, these statements introduce a parallel structure that joins covertly with everything that is a part of the world that is opened by them.⁵⁸ As Ezra Ketchet states, “*intensional operators* take arguments that are intensional (meaning they depend on situations)” (1999:23). What this means is that, when a world is shifted to by a word (e.g. believe) or a phrase (e.g. “in the world of X”), the arguments that follow contain a covert index to that world. This index is either said to be part of a lexicon related to that world or one of a “set of covert ‘world pronouns’ which are generated as sisters to all lexical predicates” (Fintel and Heim 2011:104). If I were to say, “Ben believes the man left,” both “the man” and the verb “left” would be said to be joined covertly to Ben’s belief worlds. If we were to assume the melody of *fien* denotes or is a possible world, this covert relativization could be said to occur overtly, since the melody occurs parallel with the text.

⁵⁸ In linguistics, a feature such as gender or number (e.g. plural or singular) is covert when it is not pronounced, but is understood through agreement with other elements in a sentence. For example, in Mandarin, gender is covert for pronouns in speech, since both male and female are pronounced “tā,” but overt in modern written text, where 他 is male and 她 is female.

However, structural similarity does not mean that music could be conceived as part of or related to an existing grammatical-semantic category. Just because there are some structural similarities does not mean that fien represents a way a given world is (Lewis 1986). Furthermore, if we are going to talk about worlds, it is important to clarify further what kind of worlds are candidates for fien. In this chapter, because the melody is used by a large number of people and places emphasis on the quality of the lyrics, I will evaluate whether or not fien could be considered a marker of a possible world of Zhuang oral literature.⁵⁹ In the following chapter, I will further interrogate the concept of world in an evaluation of fien through a hermeneutical lens.

The evaluation in terms of literary worlds is alluded to in the introduction, where I propose examining metaphors, topics, and expressions used in Zhuang lyrics to see if they are consistently distinct from normal speech and other forms of literature. This test of my hypothesis has its roots in David Lewis' 1978 article on truth in fiction. In this article, Lewis asserts that truth in fiction is "the joint product of two sources: the explicit content of the fiction, and a background consisting either of the facts about our world or of the beliefs overt in the community of origin" (1978:45). I relate the testing of my hypothesis to Lewis' search for truth conditions in fiction with two questions. First, is there a body of literature with enough cogency to be considered an "explicit content" of fien? Second, are there differences in the background of sets of facts and cultural beliefs when interacting with fien as opposed to interacting with other life situations or with other genres of literature or music? My earlier criteria of metaphor, topic, and expression represents a way of answering these questions in the broadest sense.

⁵⁹ Another way to state this is that fien is a marker of all possible worlds compatible with Zhuang oral literature. In intensional semantics, this same terminology is applied to beliefs of a single person (all worlds compatible with John's beliefs) and single works of literature (all worlds compatible with *War and Peace*). I use the singular of world in this chapter to reflect the continuity that is being tested in the literature of fien and for a simpler reading.

Part of the reason for this broader approach is because, although the lyrics to fien are occasionally written down, they are most often transmitted orally. This is an important additional consideration, since the teller of the story is both a “reader” of the story (or perhaps the information it is composed of) and a source of its transmission to a new audience. As Albert Lord observes, the singer “follows the plan which he has learned along with the other elements of his profession” (1960:99). In order to accomplish his plan, the singer “thinks of his song in terms of a flexible plan of themes, some of which are essential and some of which are not” (ibid.). For Lord, these themes are “groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale” (1960:68) that occur across multiple narratives. Many of these ideas are arranged through using formulas, defined by Lord as groups of words “regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” (1960:30). This way of analyzing the text of a given work, where the employment of essential themes takes precedence over individual statements and nonessential themes, is contrasted to the view of texts that vary between performances. As Lord writes, the singer’s “idea of stability, to which he is deeply devoted, does not include the wording, which to him has never been fixed, nor the unessential parts of the story. He builds his performance, or song in our sense, on the stable skeleton of narrative, which is the song in his sense” (1960:99).

These descriptions apply well to many of the different kinds of fien that we will review in this chapter. There are indeed equivalents of formulas and themes that are present in this form of traditional singing. However, despite the presence of these features, fien is distinct from the narratives described by Lord in two major ways: first, while we might be able to equate extended topics and roles of singers in fien with a kind of plot, fien is much closer to dialogue and statement in form than to narrative; second, when sung as dialogue, fien involves the agency of two groups of singers instead of a single narrator. However, as hinted in the above statements,

the absence of a strict narrative does not mean that we are not dealing with a cogent literary world; instead, it means that we need to determine if this literature exists without the benefit of a hard and fast story. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that fien can indeed be considered a literary world in its own right. I will do this through exploring the make-up of the oral literature present in these sung dialogues and individual statements, comparing them to other types of music-related literature in Zhuang culture, and through addressing the statement that “anything can be sung” in fien.

The Lyrical Content of Fien

Is there an “explicit content” of fien that is consistent enough to merit the designation of a literary world? To further clarify the complexities of answering this question, I return to the examples that were analyzed in the previous chapter, which provide a sample of the variety of lyrics used in fien. Before going further, it is critical to acknowledge that the completed sung utterances in the sample sometimes represent whole songs and at other times are part of larger sung dialogues, where several utterances will be traded between the two groups of singers. For example, the song sung by Huang Miaofan lamenting the loss of both parents is only a single utterance (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018). Conversely, four of the sung utterances occur between two groups at a song competition sponsored by the local government. These two groups each use one utterance to question the other group about a policy (in this case one on drugs, and the other on roads), and the opposing group is given the opportunity to answer (Liao, Lu, Ou, and Huang 2018). Other lyrics in the sample include a song of complaint, where a single female singer is lamenting about her husband’s gambling problem, contrasting it with the money she could make from the sugarcane harvest (Untitled Video 2018). There are also three songs of

praise: one that compliments the appearance of homes and whole villages (Li Xiaoyang 2012), one at a government-sponsored song fair praising the township and its local produce (Lu and Huang 2018), and one at a wedding praising the gifts and the family of the bride (Xiao Yang 2012). The remaining songs, and the largest portion of the sample, are love songs.

While the majority of the songs in both the sample above and in traditional singing are love songs, there is also a significant variety in the way these expressions of affection are expressed. One of the VCDs referenced in this sample is an hour-long exchange of the female singers asking the male singers for a comb and mirror, which are traditional symbols of affection (Xiao Chang 2003). The men respond with excuses for half of the song, and then the two groups switch roles; the men ask for a handkerchief (another symbol of affection), and the women make excuses. There are songs that use flowers to designate the female and male singers (white for male, and red for female) and use the imagery of flowers to praise their characteristics (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018 and Huang Wenke 2018). Some songs express longing that might not be fulfilled, while others express mutual affection. Other songs are used to initiate longer sessions of singing different kinds of love songs back and forth.

This degree of topic variation in this small sample of fien might appear daunting to the idea of this song tune representing a single world. However, if we return to the concept of the nature of a world, this kind of variety is not so strange. We would not find it unusual if all of these kinds of experiences were accessible to a single person's life; we would also not be surprised if an author could incorporate the problems of a gambling husband, praise of a place, questions of policy, and multiple images of romance into a single novel. These things might even be expected in some genres of writing. As Lewis acknowledges, "there are ever so many ways that a part of a world could be; and so many and so varied are the other worlds that absolutely every way that a

part of a world could possibly be is a way that some part of some world is” (1986:2). Worlds, then, are capable of a large amount of diversity. I will demonstrate that this diversity occurs in a common literary world of *fien* in three ways: first, I will discuss the labels used for different kinds of *fien*; second, I will examine some of the common formulas, uses of formulas, and themes featured in *fien*; third, I give example of how shared formulas and themes result in lines and strophes that are similar (if not the same) between multiple singers. For these analyses, I will expand beyond the initial set of songs used in the previous chapter to larger published sources of lyrics, interviews, and additional summaries from the recordings supporting this dissertation.

Labels for Different Kinds of Fien

During the course of interviews and collection of written materials, I have been able to put together five different lists of labels for *fien*. While this is a small number of sources, these lists come from Youjiang District, Tianyang County, and Tiandong County and represent three published sources (Zhang Shengzhen 1997 and Vangz Gwz 1982a, 1982b), an unpublished collection (Huang Wenke 2018a), and casual references from two interviews with multiple singers (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018 and Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin 2018). The song compilation edited by Zhang Shengzhen has the most kinds of *fien* listed, with eighteen categories given (1997). The remaining four sources feature approximately ten different kinds of *fien*. While there is only one song type shared by all five of the lists (*fien daiq*, also called *fien diu biengz*, which is about fleeing one’s home town with a lover, often to avoid an arranged marriage), there is a more consistent corpus of song types when taking a look at labels shared by three or more sources (Figure 4.1). I include a listing of alternate names to reflect that, although some synonyms or additional names are used for some kinds of *fien*, the basic content is the

same. One way to see this is through *fien doenghaen* (songs of meeting). Although this category has the most alternates, the reasons for the alternates are simple.

Figure 4.1: A list of common titles used to denote kinds of Tianzhou *fien*.

Common Song Titles	English Translation	Alternate/Included Names
<i>fien doenghaen</i>	songs of meeting	<i>fien ciaz</i> , <i>iu fien doiq</i> , <i>fien dox bungz</i>
<i>fien va</i>	flower songs	<i>fien cihsaem</i>
<i>fien ndiep</i>	love songs	
<i>fien gietngih</i>	songs of binding	<i>fien baeyux</i>
<i>fien duanz</i>	riddle songs	
<i>fien doengh aeu</i>	songs of mutual love	
<i>fien daiq</i>	songs of taking away	<i>fien diubiengz</i>
<i>fien yauq ngeih</i>	songs of mourning	
<i>fien biek</i>	songs of parting	<i>fien zag</i> , <i>fien doengh biek</i>

Fien dox bungz is a synonym for *doenghaen*; and *fien ciaz* and *iu fien doiq* are both songs of invitation, which is an expected part of songs of meeting. In a similar manner, I have heard *fien daiq* and *fien diubiengz* used interchangeably (Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin 2018). *Fien biek* and *fien zag* are also additional examples of synonyms being used in song titles. It is possible that *fien baeyux* might be a part of *fien gietngih*, since Huang Wenke uses both *fien gietngih* and *fien baeyux* in the same title in his compilation (2018a), while the terms were used separately in another interview (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018). Finally, although I was not able to obtain a satisfactory definition for *fien cihsaem* (Vangz Gwz 1982a), the use of certain formulas, which will be discussed below, indicate that it could be considered a kind of *fien va*.

Beyond this list of core categories, there are also other types of *fien* that are found in two sources. This includes *fien aeu gaen* (songs of taking a handkerchief),⁶⁰ *fien cam coh* (songs asking for someone's name), and *fien ndiep* (songs of love). Even with these additional categories, there are still some categories of *fien* that are unique to the individual lists compiled.

⁶⁰ As mentioned above, offering and taking a handkerchief is considered a romantic gesture in Zhuang culture.

Zhang Shengzheng's compilation has five song titles that are not mentioned in the other interviews or lists (1997). Three of the remaining four shorter lists only have one or two unique categories. Vanz Gwz's two-part compilation has four unique categories, though some of this could be due to issues with the book itself rather than the names. The short collection is written entirely in the official romanized Zhuang script, often using vocabulary from the "standard" Wuming dialect, rendering some of the words and terms unrecognizable to a speaker of Youjiang Zhuang. Even with this discrepancy, it is still significant how similar its titles are to those on the other lists consulted. Furthermore, even though some of titles in these collections and interviews are unique in the context of their lists, roughly half of them have similar content to songs used in chapter three, in other collections of Zhuang traditional singing, and in my observations of music sung at traditional events.

Formulas in Fien

In the previous chapter, I discuss meaning-bearing phrases with lexical content that also function like vocables, because of the way they can be interchanged with other similar phrases and the way they mark significant portions of a given strophe of fien. While these fit Lord's definition of formula, since they are "regularly employed under the same metrical conditions," and "express a given essential idea" (1960:30), the ideas they represent are vague. They are almost more structural than meaningful, even though their meaning does not conflict with the text that follows. Beyond these examples from the previous chapter, there are other formulas that clearly reflect a more specific meaning relative to what is sung.

One common type of formula adds inflection to strophes through specifying whether the strophe is going to be a question (Sentence 1), a challenge (Sentence 2), or an answer/rebuttal

(Sentence 3). Though I have given single lines, these usually occur in parallel structures with the second line containing synonyms for brother, sister, or both.

1. haej nuengx cam mengz goq
let sister ask you older brother
2. coenz nix nuengz yaeuh goq
sentence this sister tricks older brother
3. haej goq naeuz haej nuengx
let older brother say give sister

Other common formulas are closely associated with the titles listed above. One of the most common of these formulas is the one used in *fien va* (flower songs) shown in Example 4.

4. hojsik ngiq va nding
lovely CL flower red

This formula usually occurs as the second line of each strophe in *fien va* for the entire duration of this kind of song, or at least for major sections of it. It is used by both male and female groups, with the primary difference usually being the color of the flower. Red (*nding*) is used to refer to women, and white (*hau*) is used to refer to men. *Fien cihsaem*, mentioned above, varies slightly from this, transitioning from one instance of the formula in Example 4 to having the majority of the remaining flowers being fruit flowers (see Example 5). However, because the rest of the formula is the same, it would likely be considered a type of *fien va*.

5. hojsik ngiq va dauz
lovely CL flower peach

Other formulas are associated with song types without matching the title. In some riddle songs (*fien duenz*), key question phrases such as *bux laez* (who) and *gaiq maz* (what) take on formulaic roles beginning each of the lines in a given strophe featuring a given question type.

While what has been described about formulas in *fien* up to the present covers a large number of cases, there is also room for variation. Formulas in *fien* are most prominent at the beginning of a given strophe; however, they may also occur at other points to buy the singer time or if the line is useful at a given location. Even formulas associated with one type of *fien* might get used in a different type if they are similar enough. Some formulas might be created on the spot for a given session of singing. I have seen this happen when the line in Example 6—or a similar variant—has been used when I have been asked to sing along with other singers.

6. laeuz dwg bux (**ae** de) Meigoz (**laen**)

we are person America

Finally, it is not uncommon for multiple formulas to be used in conjunction with each other.

Example 7 shows the standard formula for opening a strophe, followed by a formula common to *fien aeu gaen* (songs of taking a handkerchief), followed by a formula indicating that the male group is going to give an answer to the female group.

7. saundi (**ae**) gvai nuengx (**na laen**)

beautiful clever sister

nuengx cam goq (**lw de**) aeu ndoi (**laen**)

sister ask older brother take comb

nangz cam gvang aeu gieng (**lw**)

woman ask husband take mirror

haej goq naeuz haej nuengx (**na laen**)
let older brother speak give to sister

Themes in Fien

The existence of a consistent set of song types and the way that formulas reference many of those same kinds of fien indicate that these song types represent culturally shared groups of ideas. Going further, it is likely that we could consider each of these groups as something that could stand on its own, or as a part of a larger whole. The latter is asserted by Zhang Shengzheng, who states that fien is a “relatively fixed and patterned type of long song. The larger pattern also contains smaller patterns. This form is similar to the table of contents in a book, causing people—in the course of antiphonal singing—to have an approximate framework” (1997:5). Zhang’s “smaller patterns” refer to the kinds of songs that are recorded in his collection and were used as source material for the list of song types above. According to this view, at least as far as antiphonal singing is concerned, fien is a single large structure with the song types representing smaller parts of the larger whole.

In my fieldwork and experience with fien, this has indeed been the case. Every time I have sung with a traditional singer in the local park in Baise or at a song fair, we have moved through multiple kinds of fien. While there is no exact order or mandatory requirement for all of the song-types to be sung, these song categories typically represent different stages of a relationship and progress accordingly. Because of this, antiphonal singing usually begins with introductory song-types such as *fien doenghaen* or *fien ciaz*. These usually progress to (or already include) songs asking about personal identity and hometown and songs of flattery. If the two groups enjoy singing with each other, deeper flattery songs, such as *fien va*, might be used, or the groups

might progress to songs that tease each other about love. Unless two groups are already familiar with each other, or have already been singing for a while, they do not begin with love songs or songs encouraging a lover to run off with them. In this sense, although these songs have a significant improvised component to them, they are connected to each other through a relational narrative that is both subject to the agency of the singers and the degree of variance permitted in each major section selected to be a part of this dialogue. In a similar manner, there are also other sets of songs connected to life events, such as a marriage and the birth of children. For example, marital songs generally follow the pattern of marriage customs, with songs about gifts being followed by songs of waiting, and songs of picking up the bride (Qin Jindun 2017a and Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018).

At the same time, though, there is enough material associated with some song types for them to contain multiple themes that are shared by other types of *fien*. Most VCDs of *fien* only have one or two types of *fien* on each disk because a single type can easily last an hour or more. In these longer songs, emotional themes such as anxiety, longing, and mutual affection are expanded and set against the backdrop of more developed life-related themes such as traveling, farming, and waiting. For example, in Xiao Chang's 2003 VCD set, the entire first VCD is dedicated to a song of taking a handkerchief (*fien aeu gaen*) mentioned above, where both male and female groups switch between requesting tokens of affection and giving excuses for not having them. In this example, both requests and excuses feature some of the themes just mentioned. For one strophe, the women say they are desperate for a mirror and comb because they travelled across "mountains upon mountains," "hills upon hills," and under thorny brush (Xiao Chang 2003). Similar lines about crossing over mountains and streams are used in Huang's lyrics for songs of invitation (*fien ciaz*) (2018a) and in a song expressing hope that a

lover will arrive, sung on Xiao Yang's 2012 recording of wedding singers. When the men ask for a handkerchief, it eventually leads to a discussion regarding if the weather has been good enough to gather the cotton needed to make the handkerchief (Xiao Chang 2003). In one strophe, the women assert that the weather has been too dry for growing cotton; in the following strophe, the men insist that this is not the case. I encountered a similar set of strophes when listening to the singing of Huang Miaofan that were not from *fien aeu gaen*. Singing about being afraid the relationship might not work, Huang uses the metaphors of no thunder or rain, and dry ground, to express her perception. Conversing with those around her after the song is finished, Huang mentions that the men would usually reply that it is thundering and raining and that they will come right away (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018).

Shared Content between Collections of Lyrics

Comparing the *fien* of different collections and singers produces closer similarities than just the use of similar themes and similar formulas. Even when singers claim that the *fien* they sing is their own, much of the content can be found to closely resemble or even directly match the lyrics in other collections or of other singers. A couple of months after showing Professor Qin the VCD I had obtained of singers complimenting gifts at a wedding, he brought me to his home village to interview his sister-in-law Huang Miaofan and listen to her sing a few wedding songs. Although she claimed to be singing songs that she came up with herself, seventy percent of her lyrics were similar or, in some cases, nearly identical to those on the VCD. This is not to diminish Huang Miaofan's effort or claim, but rather to observe that the use of similar themes and formulas is bound to result in a high degree of analogous content, even among songs that are put together without seeking help from another source. This can be seen not only in similarities between

strophes sung at weddings, but also in other types of *fien* as well. One of the last songs of Huang Miaofan recorded from my interview in Qin's village shares at least half of its content with the end of the first strophe of *fien va* in the lyric collection given to me by Huang Wenke.

Furthermore, although Huang Miaofan's strophe of *fien va* has fewer similarities in its specific content, it has the same themes as the first half of the first strophe of Huang Wenke's version of *fien va*. Both singers start with the same extended formula for *fien va*, compliment the appearance and intelligence of the person they sing to, and compare them to royalty.

These instances of shared content are not limited to those I have observed between Huang Miaofan and other singers. I have also heard the strophes from Huang Wenke's collection sung by other singers and have found examples of the same lines and strophes in published written collections. It is important to note here that Huang Wenke has met and sung with one of the singers contributing to Zhang Shengzheng's compilation. This, combined with his selling of VCDs, means that it is possible that some of his material may have been drawn from the lyrics of other singers. This would not be unusual if at least some of his material was added from interactions with other singers; however, since he has been singing from a very young age, it is more likely that much of this material is common across multiple singers. When discussing commonalities of the content used by different singers, Professor Qin gave a casual estimate that seventy to eighty percent of the content he has heard has been similar, but that twenty to thirty percent has been original to those singing (2018f).

Exploring Other Kinds of Youjiang Zhuang Literature

Are there boundaries to the literary world of *fien*, or is it a tune that anything can be sung to? While we have been able to present evidence that there is a central body of literature associated

with fien, kinds of literature generally have culturally situated boundaries or truth conditions relative to their worlds. As Lewis notes, “it is wrong, or at least eccentric, to read the Holmes stories as if they might for all we know be taking place at a world where three-nostrilled detectives pursue purple gnomes” (1978:42). While Lewis is talking about “departures from actuality” in this statement, a similar problem might be caused by careless mixing of literature. For example, Biblical characters would generally not be assumed to inhabit the world of the Sherlock Holmes stories, even though segments of society during the time of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and during the present can be said to have read both types of literature. For this reason, part of my assessment of fien includes the question of whether or not other potential bodies of literature could be used inside its traditional melodic frame. For my interviews and field research, I selected two widespread and well-known Zhuang genres of music to make this assessment. These two kinds of music are the *dangzvuangz* songs, mentioned briefly in chapter two, and a rhythmic speech genre common throughout China called *kuaiban* (快板 *kuàibǎn*). Both the *dangzvuengz* songs and *kuaiban* share some similarities with fien, while also being distinct in their musical forms and modes of performance. This section opens a discussion over whether these two different musical genres represent different bodies of literature from fien, or if there is no correlation between lyrical content and musical style in Zhuang singing. The first part of this evaluation is a descriptive comparison introducing these genres and how their music and lyric structures relate to fien.

The Dangzvuengz Songs

Figure 4.2: A transcription of a typical iteration of the *dangzvuengz* songs as sung by Luo Daqiang and Wei Zhengbing (2018). These two lines expressing boredom before the story (here of Wenlong) are often used at the beginning of these songs.

uq - ndiai - mbaeuq-(ah-) miz (dw) gajj (ah) maz - lwnh (yi ya)
 here idle Neg have anything to say
 (We) are here (and we are) idle, and (we) don't have anything to say

laeuz lwnh (ah) fuenz longz (ah) daeuj (ah) gajj - (ah) mbwn
 we say Wenlong come change boredom
 We will tell the story of Wenlong to relieve (our) boredom

The *dangzvuengz diuz* (*dangzvuengz* tune) is a strophic melody used for singing a collection of written narrative stories. The most prominent of these stories are “The Tale of Wenlong,” “The Tale of Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo,” and the “Tale of the Tang Emperor.”⁶¹ Although these stories are all of Han origin, they have been translated into Zhuang for hundreds of years and are more reflective of Zhuang traditional culture than of their original Han counterparts (Nong Weipei 2017 and Yang Yumei 2018). I was first introduced to these songs during Spring Festival in 2011, when Professor Qin’s parents sang a small portion of the story of Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo. I would not have an encounter with these sung stories again until January 2019. While there are no apparent cultural restrictions on where, when, or how this song can be sung (Nong Weipei 2017), I have not come across this tune as often as I have fien. There are a number of different factors that might play into this relative obscurity, such as the stamina it

⁶¹ In one interview, it was said that there are seven books of Tang Huang stories (Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin 2018). However, the only stories I have heard performed in the course of my fieldwork have been the “The Tale of Wenlong” and a small portion of “The Tale of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai.” It is worth noting that these two tales are also the only ones I was able to find on VCD during my research.

takes to sing these longer songs,⁶² that the content is recitational and not conversational, and that a certain degree of literacy is required to read them. Despite the marked lack of public performance relative to *fien*, the *dangzvuengz* songs appear to have a devoted following. I have heard the *dangzvuengz* songs drift through the air from multiple portable MP3 players, and even had a VCD set of two of the *dangzvuengz* stories bought out from under me when the person next to me heard the salesman give me a preview of the discs I was about to buy. The tune is also occasionally used for government events, though with different lyrics. For my analysis of this tune, I was able to obtain one complete script and run-through of “The Tale of Wenlong,” multiple field recordings of the melody, and a VCD set of two of the sung stories.

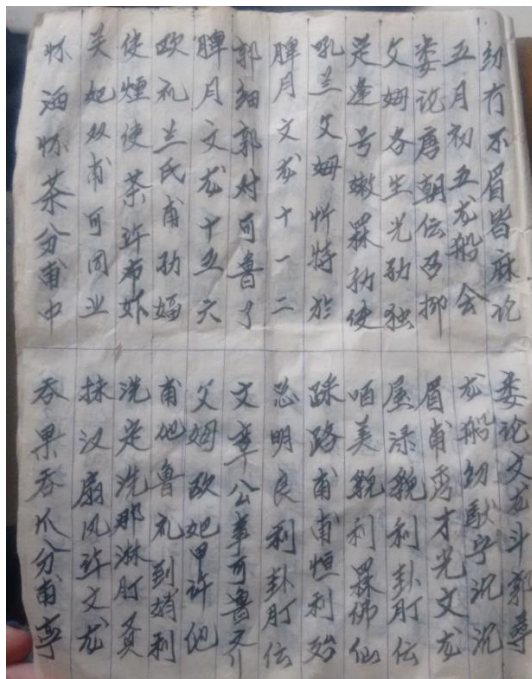
The *dangzvuengz* songs are similar to *fien* in that they use a single melodic frame that is cycled for the duration of the song. Nong Weipei observes that the primary melody is a fixed element of the *dangzvuengz* tune, while its variation is subject to the requirements of the Zhuang language and the habits of individual singers (2017:5). However, aside from this initial similarity, there are some notable differences between these two strophic styles of singing. Some of the characteristics distinguishing *dangzvuengz*, such as the use of traditional Zhuang script as the primary form of transmission, a greater tendency for private performance, and the smaller number of people able to sing these songs, have already been mentioned in chapter two. However, there are additional distinctions to be found in the way these tunes manifest themselves in performance.

The melodic frame employed for singing the *dangzvuengz* stories uses two lines of seven syllables for each iteration, while *fien* can use either one or two lines. This means that the

⁶² “The Tale of Wenlong” is one of the shorter stories and is 500-600 lines long; it can take anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour to sing. In a VCD collection containing both “The Tale of Wenlong” and “The Tale of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai,” the Wenlong story is an hour long, while the latter story is two hours long (Luo Meizhen n.d.)

melody for each iteration of the *dangzvuengz* tune is approximately the same length. Additionally, there is no finishing iteration, meaning that all of the iterations take the same basic form. The consequence of this is that we can regard a strophe as being equivalent to an iteration in *dangzvuengz*. This is in contrast to *fien*, where the strophe corresponds better to the lines between the starting and finishing iteration of a given utterance. This difference can even be seen in a brief comparison of collections of *fien* lyrics and of *dangzvuengz* lyrics. When the *dangzvuengz* stories are written out, there is often a line drawn between the upper and lower lines of an iteration. Since there are only two lines for each iteration, each set of lines corresponds with a repetition of the melody (see Figure 4.3). However, with *fien*, only the strophe is known from the arrangement of the lines in written collections. How the lines correspond with the Tianzhou tune is generally realized in performance.

Figure 4.3: The first page of a booklet for singing “The Tale of Wenlong” belonging to Luo Daqiang. The first line is in the top-right corner and is read down through the second line below it.



Another major difference in the form of these two singing styles can be seen in the use of vocables. While *fien* has a variety of structural and ornamental vocables, they are sparser in the *dangzvuengz* tune. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *fien* has vocables that mark iterations, stock phrases that mark the beginning and end of each strophe, and ornamental vocables that frequently occur between most syllables in a given iteration. In contrast, *dangzvuengz* has ornamental vocables for approximately half of the syllables in each line. There is only one vocable (ah) that divides the two lines in a

given iteration. Finally, while there is a stock phrase that marks the beginning of at least two of the stories I have listened to (see Figure 4.2 above), this stock phrase begins what will be at least two to three hundred iterations of the melody.

As mentioned earlier, the dangzvuengz stories have been in existence in written form for a few hundred years and are derived from pre-existent Han Chinese stories. This places them out of the category of oral literature. Practically, this can be seen in a marked absence of consistent formulas. However, this does not mean that formulas do not exist, just that they do not play the same critical role held by the formulas described by Albert Lord. The opening couplet of each story, “I am here and idle with nothing to say, so I will say/sing X to change my boredom,” could be considered a kind of formula, even though it is used only at the beginning of a tale. In “The Tale of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai,” there is a kind of formula used when describing all of the things that Zhu Yingtai knows how to sew; each line in this short section begins with the words *lox siuj* (knows how to sew . . .). However, while there may be other formulas similar to this in these stories, they are not as common as those that occur in fien. One additional candidate for a kind of formula is the names of major characters, since they often occur at the beginning of iterations and are carried over into the following lines as subjects. However, there is very little difference in the rhythm or melody between when these names or labels are used and when other words are used.

Although the use of formulas in the performances of dangzvuengz is not done with the same frequency as those in oral literature, the use of themes in these sung narratives is actually closer in form to the themes described by Lord than those that are commonly used in fien. Much of this is likely due to the fact that the lyrics sung to the dangzvuengz melody are defined stories, and not conversations. Furthermore, these themes resemble those of Lord, in that they “are the same

song” (1960:122) in respect to their major themes. The songs start with a hero/heroine who is removed from his/her original context. “The Tale of the Tang Emperor” tells the story of the Tang Emperor Li Dan fleeing south into territory held by the Zhuang. “The Tale of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai” starts with the woman disguising herself as a man so that she can go to school. “The Tale of Wenlong” tells of a man who must travel to the capital for an indefinite period of time. This theme of travel is coupled with a love interest. With the Tang emperor and Zhu Yingtai, their respective loves are met during their journeys. Wenlong’s love interest is already established as a fortunate arranged marriage at the beginning of the tale. In all three stories, the women are pursued by other suitors in the absence of their lovers and face heavy pressure to remarry. In “The Tale of the Tang Emperor,” shortly after the marriage of emperor Li Dan and Fengjiao, the local people compel Li Dan to retake his throne. When he is rumored to be dead, Fengjiao is pursued by suitors, who want to force her into a marriage. Wenlong is gone for so long that his wife, Xiaoni, is promised to another man. For Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, their relationship is unknown to Zhu Yingtai’s parents, and Zhu Yingtai is promised to a wealthy man. While the endings of the stories have a wider degree of variation (including between different versions of these stories), the lovers find themselves reunited physically or spiritually.

Kuaiban in Zhuang Culture

Figure 4.4: An example of the interplay between the spoken lyrics and clapper in kuaiban (“Guangxi Tianyang xian Ganzhuangshan kuaiban” 2015). Another feature of this sample typical to kuaiban is the exaggerated response (threatening an injection of medication) given to finding the husband asleep.

Figure 4.4 shows the interplay between the spoken lyrics and clapper in kuaiban. The notation is divided into two parts: Voice and Clapper. The Voice part consists of two lines of lyrics: "cih mengz (ah) ninz haen naiq gou daiq mengz (ah) bac dwg gim" and "if you sleep very tired, I take you go get an injection". The Clapper part consists of six 'x' marks on a line, indicating the clapper's response to the lyrics.

Kuaiban is a genre of rhythmic speaking that is most often accompanied with a clapper, which alternates between providing a steady beat and providing additional ornamentation. While *kuaiban* is a more recent addition to Zhuang culture than the *dangzvuengz* stories, emerging with the regular staged performances introduced by the Chinese government during the middle of the twentieth century, it is still regarded by some as essential part of Zhuang culture (Wei Xiujin 2011). As it has developed, *kuaiban* has grown to cover a wide range of topics, from life circumstances to propaganda. My middle-aged Zhuang acquaintances and teachers are all familiar with *kuaiban*, having grown up hearing it. However, *kuaiban* is seldom performed among the current generation of Zhuang. Most major staged performances now involve pop songs and plays. During my fieldwork experience, I have only come across *kuaiban* on two or three occasions. The largest of these performances was at the township level, during a minor local holiday. Because of the fading popularity of *kuaiban*, and because it was not the primary focus of this dissertation, much of my own exposure to this genre has come from searching for language resources to study while learning Youjiang Zhuang. This decline in popularity also meant that I was not able to find any VCDs of Zhuang-language *kuaiban*. However, I was able to obtain a few examples on Chinese video sites, such as Youku, and from performances sent to me over Wechat from my Zhuang language informant Wang Zhongji. While they certainly do not represent the entire corpus of *kuaiban* in the Youjiang Zhuang language, they do represent performances that have been popular enough to garner a few views online or to be passed around on Chinese social media.

Kuaiban in Zhuang culture is very similar to *kuaiban* in other parts of China. Francesca Sborgi Lawson's description of *kuaiban* in Tianjin making "rhythm and stress (rather than intonation) the aesthetic centerpiece of performance" and of *kuaiban* being "carried by a

rhythmic ostinato” (2016:55) also applies to the kuaiban of the Zhuang. Both the spoken nature of kuaiban and its use of a clapper for accompaniment set it apart from the other two genres discussed in this chapter. This clapper is made from two slabs of bamboo, which are joined together by a string. Usually one slab is held still in the right hand with the string looped over the thumb, allowing the second slab to hang free. In this configuration, a flick of the wrist will cause the free-hanging slab to strike the stationary one. While some kuaiban performances I have seen feature heavy ornamentation of the clapper between sections of the performance, most feature an ostinato that is either given by one of the performers or pre-recorded. While kuaiban in Sborgi Lawson’s account is used primarily as a solo story telling genre (2016), in my experience of watching Zhuang kuaiban, it has either consisted of solo performances recounting the good things the government has done for the Zhuang people or arguments featuring one male and one female performer. Also, all of the kuaiban performances I have seen have been staged performances at town, township, and county-level events. This aspect of staged performance as a typical or native environment is an important distinguishing feature of kuaiban relative to fien or dangzvuengz. As a staged vocal genre, it frequently includes gestures and brief moments of action that often coordinate with kuaiban rhythms, especially in kuaiban performances that are arguments.

Despite the spoken and performative nature of this genre, there are still musical aspects that bear a resemblance to both fien and dangzvuengz. While there is no melody to analyze, kuaiban does have a rhythmic frame corresponding with each line. In general, the rhythmic frame is four beats long, with the strongest accent occurring on the first and third beats of the frame. There is a secondary accent on the second beat, and the fourth beat is often silent. Typically, there are five syllables, with the first four corresponding with half-beat units and the final syllable being held

for a full beat. This frame is often very similar to the rhythm used between singers of *fien*, when the lyrics are given from one singer to another in the moment before they are sung. Also, as with *fien*, the length and rhythm of the frame vary with changes in the number of syllables and ornamental vocables. However, in contrast to *fien*, even when the rhythmic frame changes with the number of syllables, it still encompasses a single line. In the absence of melody, rhymes are the primary feature grouping these lines together, with end rhymes being the most common form used. Although there are decorative vocables used in *kuaiban*, there are no structural vocables indicating the ends of lines or the ends of utterances. In the case of *kuaiban*, the pauses and lengthening of the ends of lines and utterances take this role.

In contrast to *fien* and the *dangzvuengz* stories, *kuaiban* does not have clearly defined formulas. There may be some lines that are similar or the same between different performances that resemble each other rhythmically; however, they do not have the same structural significance as the formulas mentioned in *fien* or even the candidates for formulas in the discussion of the *dangzvuengz* songs. Despite this distinction, the *kuaiban* performances I was able to observe and understand with the help of Wang Zhongji exhibit two clear thematic structures. The first is a historically based praise structure, recounting what life was like for local Zhuang before and after the Open Door Policy of Deng Xiaoping. The second is an argument structure between male and female performers, where there is a disagreement about some kind of life practice or policy. Bickering and insults are exchanged until close to the end, where one or both of the parties admits wrong thinking, and they resolve their differences, chanting the last strophe in unison. Topics in these arguments concern gambling, whether or not a husband should go out dancing, catching a husband going out to find a younger woman, and whether or not the husband is paying close enough attention to his family. These themes more closely resemble the

conversational aspect of fien in a more condensed form than the third-person narratives of the dangzvuengz stories. In the case of the praise structures, this conversation is primarily between the performer and the audience. In the argument kuaiban, the conversations are carried out in a more overt manner. However, unlike fien, which can allow the expansion of a theme to the point where it can contain multiple themes, kuaiban performances are more limited by the time requirements of staged performances. The performances I have observed have usually been around ten minutes in length and have never exceeded half an hour.

Addressing the Claim that “Anything” Can be Sung in Fien

The final section of this chapter addresses a claim I have heard a few times during the course of my field research about both fien and kuaiban, that any kind of kuaiban or fien can exist. In these statements, “any kind” refers to the lyrics and not the melodic progression (or form of performance in the case of kuaiban). A similar claim to this is that singers can use whatever is around them to make a song. Such claims present a significant challenge to my assertion that melody in fien indicates a possible world. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, literary boundaries are important for the consideration of fien as a possible world because it demonstrates a clear correlation between lyrical content and the melody used for singing fien. For example, if we can demonstrate that the dangzvuengz songs and fien cannot exchange lyrics, we have a very clear instance of lyrical divisions that correlate with tune types. On the other hand, if anything can be sung in fien, there may be no relationship between the tune and the lyrics in terms of worlds. This is because, in intensional semantics, worlds are related to statements that can be made about them, statements that can be true or false. If any kind of literature is permitted in fien, or if any kind of metaphor, topic, and expression is permitted in

fien, then there is no basis for lyrical statements being made relative to a literature associated with fien.

If we cannot resolve this issue, then the syntactic relationship discussed in the previous chapter likely comes from another source, such as prosodic arrangements of rhyme, pitch, and syllable count. On the other hand, it is possible that the claim that “any kind” of fien can exist is wrong. Dismissing the claim at this point is problematic, though, because it would mean disregarding claims made by those who are more intimately connected with fien than I could ever be. There is also no reason to consider these statements as exaggeration or as figurative. However, it may be possible to resolve the idea that anything can be sung in fien or spoken in kuaiban with the concept of a cogent form of literature associated with fien through continuing the exploration of literary boundaries between fien and other kinds of Zhuang music.

Exploring the Use of Other Forms of Literature in Fien

In the previous section, I give a basic overview of two additional genres of Zhuang music, the dangzvuengz songs and kuaiban. One of the reasons for including those genres of music in this study is to explore the potential for exchanging lyrics between these different musical styles. In a small number of interviews, I was able to ask whether or not kuaiban or dangzvuengz lyrics could be used in the tune of fien and vice versa. A strong negative response would indicate that the boundaries between these different musical forms extend to their lyrics, strengthening my hypothesis that these musical forms mark literary worlds. A strong positive response would weaken my hypothesis, since it would indicate that the content of fien is not associated with the melody. The responses to this central question, however, were mixed. Both groups of women I interviewed asserted firmly that dangzvuengz was dangzvuengz and fien was fien and claimed

the same type of relationship with kuaiban (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018 and Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin 2018). The men I spoke with, however, felt that as long as the rhyming requirements were met, that kuaiban and dangzvuengz lyrics could be sung as fien (Huang, Pan, and Qin 2017 and Liao Qizhong 2018). To test this further, I wrote out a set of kuaiban lyrics from one of the videos I had reviewed with Wang Zhongji and a set of lyrics from the story of Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo. I attempted to sing them in the fien melody for Professor Qin and for Huang Wenke, receiving mixed results. Professor Qin felt that these cross-overs would not be appreciated (2018g), while Huang found them acceptable (2018d).

Following these mixed assertions into categories of fien and written literature also shows an unclear result. In my own experience of singing along with performers in the park and at song fairs, I have wound up attempting to sing along with songs honoring Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping and speaking positively of current policies. These lyrics are somewhat similar to the political kuaiban I have listened to in terms of their overall content. Another potential similarity to kuaiban is the existence of fien used for arguments; though I have not personally encountered *fien doenghnda* (songs of mutual scolding), it was given as a category of fien in one of my interviews (Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin 2018). However, while both of these categories—of politics and arguing—encompass all of the kuaiban I have encountered, I have only come across political fien a couple of times out of several encounters, and I have never heard scolding used in fien. Zhang Shengzhen’s collection of fien contains neither scolding songs nor political songs. However, there are a few examples of the dangzvuengz stories being referenced. Zhang observes that parts of *fien gietngih* (songs of binding) compiled by him “use the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai to express love’s certain deep affection” (1997:405). However, this use of the story of the butterfly lovers is not an oral retelling of this tale, but a short reference. As Zhang

observes, the singers are using the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai as a foil to express their affection and desire that they can be together in the present, instead of in the afterlife as in the original narrative.

Evaluating Uses of Other Forms of Literature in Fien

These mixed results, while not providing firm support or firm challenge to the second part of my hypothesis, do provide a few different explanations for the above assertion that there can be any kind of fien. The first is that there is a spectrum of beliefs about fien itself. For some, the literature of fien is more clearly defined through what has been established in the past, or what they have been exposed to in their own lifetimes of singing. For others, fien is an open literary-scape that can encompass a multitude of possibilities. Since the women I interviewed did not sell fien and were primarily familiar with the use of fien for singing love songs, their association of fien with those songs—and not with the kinds of lyrics used in kuaiban or the dangzvuengz songs—is understandable. Since the men I interviewed had either worked with the local culture bureau, sold VCDs of fien, or participated in singing competitions, they were exposed to additional possibilities.

A second explanation is that the assertion of any kind of fien existing represents an ideal of fien. Since a good singer is one who can generate a large number of lyrics, that person might be able to take anything around her or him and work it into what is being sung, which is a very common occurrence. In the examples given above, this inclusion of a concept into the literature of fien is most clearly seen in bringing the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai into *fien gietngih*. I have also witnessed other similar instances of this kind of inclusion in my field experience. When I have participated in singing fien, I have often been used as an additional

element in the song. Being an American can be used to say that I have traveled far to find a Chinese or Zhuang wife, asking if someone really loves me enough to wait for my graduation, or saying regretfully that I have to fly all the way back to America. While this does represent a change in what is normally used for the lyrical content, the themes used, and the forms they take, are still very much the same. As mentioned above, even the songs sung in favor of policies or in praise of a certain area have precedents in traditional types of *fien*. In a similar manner, the direct inclusion of lyrics from *kuaiban* and the *dangzvuengz* songs could be seen as an extension of this ideal of lyrical production in *fien*.

A third explanation is that any kind of lyrics can be included in the melody, but that certain sources of lyrics would still be considered as being outside the literature of *fien*. For example, if all one knew how to sing were promotions of policies and localities, *kuaiban*, and *dangzvuengz* stories, that person would likely not be regarded as a competent singer of *fien*. The result would probably not change even with songs asking and answering questions about policies, praising a time in history, or praising a given village, even though these are similar to *fien duenz* (riddle songs) and *fien naeuz* (songs of praise). Conversely, if one was very familiar with the different forms of *fienz duenz*, *fien naeuz*, and other primary types of *fien*, but did not participate in venues where government-sponsored lyrics are sung, that person would still be regarded as a good singer. This explanation draws from the absence of *dangzvuengz* and *kuaiban* lyrics in written *fien* collections. Adding to this, it would not be expected to go out to a typical singing venue and hear a group of people using the tune from *fien* to sing through the *dangzvuengz* stories or using lyrics from a local *kuaiban* performance. While it is something that would be acceptable to some in theory, it is not a common practice. Anything might be able to be sung in *fien*, but in normal instances of singing, not everything is.

These proposed explanations for anything being able to be sung in fien would almost certainly find a place among authors and critics of literature in the West. Stories that have had a significant impact on Western culture often get retold in myriads of ways with differing degrees of reception from audiences. While Lewis calls it “wrong or at least eccentric” to have purple gnomes in the world of Sherlock Holmes (1978:42), zombies have already been added to Jane Austen’s classic *Pride and Prejudice* with a surprisingly small number of changes made to the original text and a generally positive reception (Austen and Grahame-Smith 2009). Of course, much of what permits this kind of present-day literary gymnastics lies in the changes in beliefs in what could happen in the background of a work of fiction. In an interview with *Time*, Seth Grahame-Smith (the author of this new spin on Austen’s work) goes so far as to assert that the personalities of the main characters and unexplained locations of military encampments make it “almost as if Jane Austen was subconsciously setting this up” (2009). Indeed, the vacancies in the backgrounds of familiar classic tales have even been used by the original authors of these well-known works, which enabled Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to famously bring Holmes back to life after what was supposed to be his final case. However, as with fien, not everyone accepts that anything can be added to these classics. A set of authors may believe they can add whatever they want to established literary worlds in Western culture, but not everyone will believe these additions are possible. Finally, even when the introduction of outside literature into a given world is accepted, the outside content (in our example above, the modern literature of zombies) is still recognized as something with its own separate identity relative to the original world. Likewise, kuaiban and dangzvuengz lyrics would still be recognized as belonging to their respective musical forms, even if they were to be sung to the Tianzhou tune.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I ask two questions related to whether or not fien might be able to be considered a possible world in a manner similar to David Lewis' evaluation of truth in fiction. The goal of this is to see if the syntactic correlation of fien might be able to fit an existing semantic category. To reiterate, the first question concerns whether or not there is a body of literature with enough consistency to be a kind of "explicit content" of fien (Lewis 1978). The second question deals with whether or not there are differences in the backgrounds of facts and cultural beliefs underlying both fien and other kinds of literature or music.

That there is an explicit content to fien is evident in the song topics as represented by the shared categories, shared themes between these categories, and larger structures that tie many of these categories together. In particular, the categories and themes they contain are where we can see statements that can be made relative to the literature of fien. While this is evident in the fulfillment of expectations illustrated in Huang Miaofan's elaboration of how a man would typically respond to her singing, a stronger statement was given to me in a class from Huang Wenke. In one of our earlier classes, Huang Wenke informed me that men and women must sing the same kind of fien when they sing together (2018b). If the women were to sing one category of fien, while the men sang another, this would not work. Although there is agency in the conversations that develop in fien, this agency is guided by defined categories of singing. New categories and improvisations are guided by the themes making up existing categories.

Differences in the backgrounds of cultural beliefs underlying the forms of Zhuang music explored in this chapter can be seen in the distance between literary centers and in the way potential literary cross-over is viewed. While the dangzvuengz songs and fien both overlap in their elaboration on human love, the stories in the dangzvuengz collection do this exclusively

through third-person narrative that spans months and years in a fixed plot. Additionally, the three dangzvuengz narratives discussed in this chapter all follow the same basic progression of traveling lovers becoming separated, the female being forced (or nearly forced) into a marriage, and the lovers coming together again in this life or the next. In fien, the progression drawing the themes together is more of an unfolding relationship between two singers (or two groups of singers), where both parties determine the direction of the relationship. While this conversational aspect is shared with kuaiban, fien differs from kuaiban, with the latter's emphasis on themes of politics and arguments. These themes, which are central to the lyrics used in kuaiban, are at best peripheral in fien.

Finally, the primary objection that arises from my fieldwork, that anything could be sung in fien, is explainable by examining at the amount of literature cross-over in fien and the attitudes toward the potential for cross-over. The mixture of both the attitudes toward the potential for cross-over and the ways these instances of similar lyrics and themes occur in the materials examined provides a degree of confidence in being able to approach the concept of anything being sung in a more nuanced way. Potential explanations of spectrums of belief about what “anything” can encompass, ideals of lyric creation, and the recognition of literary boundaries that are still present in the inclusion of other kinds of literature can not only be seen in fien, but also in our own literature in the West.

Similar to chapter three, there is a need for a deeper exploration of the literature discussed in this chapter, as well as a larger survey of attitudes toward boundaries between these forms of music. The same difficulties present in bringing forward non-grammatical music possibilities—that Zhuang do not usually talk about fien in this way, and an expectation that I be fluent in Zhuang to sing—also affected my ability to discuss alternate ways of singing. However, the

materials I have collected and the conversations I have had with singers and local Zhuang up to the present continue to support the assertion that the melody of fien correlates with an existing body of oral literature.

CHAPTER 5: SPEAKING OF AND LIVING WITH FIEN

In the previous chapters, I have discussed how fien relates to other similar genres of music, both in the regions inhabited by the Youjiang Zhuang and in the wider region of Southeast Asia; I have also provided data supporting a structural analysis of fien and a potential significance to that structure. In this chapter, I change focus from one that is somewhat removed from the Zhuang who participate in this way of doing music, to examining how the Zhuang view fien. Typically, this aspect of research is discussed toward the beginning of an academic work to provide additional cultural context for the discourse that follows. However, switching the order of normal presentation provides two major benefits to the discussion of fien's relationship with the Zhuang language.

First, it enables a re-evaluation of my analysis through the lens of how the Zhuang talk about and evaluate fien. For the Zhuang, fien is a life activity and not something that is analyzed using the methods of the last two chapters. A singer might not take very much interest in my work, since it is more of an overly complicated assessment of what is already done, as opposed to something that might actually lead to better singing. However, since most Zhuang who listen to and sing fien have an idea of what makes good fien, and I am still very much a neophyte in this regard, listening to their perspective and their ways of reflecting on fien in language is very beneficial to this study. While this does not remove any of my own bias—since I am still recording, translating, and interpreting these phrases and conversations—it still contributes a layer of understanding concerning the nature of fien.

Second, a discussion of the Zhuang perspective of fien is also critical for questions concerning how music connects to worlds. The discussion of possible worlds in the previous chapter primarily concerned the relationship between song melodies and literary worlds. While

some performers of fien were cited, there was very little discussion about how people have lived with this musical form. It is here, then, that we move from evaluating the concept of fien as a possible world in terms of a primarily structural move in the field of linguistics to evaluating fien through a hermeneutical lens.

This change in focus of our evaluation brings us from the logical-semantic process of intensional semantics to the hermeneutical concept of world expressed in the writings of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. In hermeneutics, the world is “something that surrounds me, that can submerge me,” and “something I do not produce but in which I find myself” (Ricoeur 1998:29). This sense of the world can also be expressed as “one’s own’ closest environment” (Heidegger 1962:93). This view of the world is different from other definitions that see the world as a totality of entities that are in the world (ibid.). As we find ourselves in this world, we interact with objects, people, and institutions that are important to us that we notice in the world with us. We do not necessarily give equal amounts of attention to each object and action within range of our senses, but rather to those things that are of interest to us, that we notice, that are “present at hand” (Heidegger 1962). We acquire knowledge about these objects and their place in the world through interacting with them. For example, we most effectively understand what a hammer is by using it for ourselves; we know what a door and latch are from opening and locking. Heidegger calls the knowability of objects through their usability as being “ready to hand” (ibid). We draw our understanding of the world to us through these entities that are present at hand and ready to hand. As Hanna Arendt states, “The reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced” (2018:95-96). At the same time, Heidegger observes that the world is more

than just the sum of these entities; it is also separate from them as the place where we perceive these entities to reside (1962).

Tradition and language give us an awareness of what is or could be at hand along with an understanding of their place in the world so that our introductions to these things are already primed. The everyday sense of the world can be communicated in language and also experienced in other worlds of literature, play, and music, and works of art. These forms are not only capable of creating other worlds, but also of offering creative renderings of what we recognize as our own world. Language “has a ‘worldly’ being of its own” in the sense that it can be “broken up into word-Things which are present-at-hand” (Heidegger 1962:204). This aspect of language allows us to communicate about the world we experience and about the pluralities of worlds that we encounter in fiction, literature, and myth. Paul Ricoeur discusses how these narrative worlds, through the process of mimesis, “bring about an augmentation of meaning in the field of human action” (1991:138). For Ricoeur, mimesis occurs in three moments: first, in the pre-understanding of the semantics, symbolism, and temporal characteristics of human action (Ricoeur 1991:142); second, in signifying “the production of a quasi-world of action through the activity of emplotment” (Ricoeur 1991:143); and third through the quasi-world of emplotted text meeting and influencing the world of the reader. This influential power of a work possessing its own semantic autonomy is critical to Paul Ricoeur’s definition of a literary world, which must “perform for the spectator or the reader the work of refiguration that overturns expectations and changes horizons” (1998:29).

Analogous characteristics of worlding can also be seen when humans play and when they make music. The world of play, along with its rules and objects, must be taken seriously by those involved in order for it to maintain its existence and perform its own work of shifting the horizons

of the players. As Gadamer writes, “play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play. Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play” (2004:102-103). In a similar manner, Roger Savage asserts that “music attains its real value and meaning when it becomes a condition of a way of inhabiting the world. Trance, ecstasy, and ritual practices, in suspending the order of profane existence through the creation of special worlds of time, multiply the ‘eternity’ experiences that in their own ways reply to the enigma of time and its other” (2010:119).

These concepts concerning the refiguration of our everyday world being an essential marker of experiencing literary, play, and artistic worlds beyond ourselves bring new questions to evaluate the worlding qualities of fien. Is fien lived in? Does an encounter with fien change moods or perceptions of time? Is fien spoken about in ways that set it apart from other kinds of human audition or behavior? Does fien change the way a person views or interacts with the world? In addressing these kinds of questions, I have divided this chapter into three sections. The first is an investigation of the vocabulary that is commonly used to discuss musical events in the Zhuang language, and of how this reflects Zhuang views on musical practice. The second section is an examination of the lives of some of the people I have interviewed, how they have learned fien, and cultural issues that have arisen in interviews and conversations. The final section is my own experience of learning to sing Zhuang songs. Although this chapter is primarily about how I have heard the Zhuang talk about their music, my own experience with fien includes Zhuang reactions to my learning elementary principles of singing, providing an additional way fien can be discussed.

Vocabulary Related to Doing Fien

In writing about the relationship between musical concepts and the words that convey them, Bruno Nettl notes that “the way in which terms appear in discourse about music may tell us about the configuration of the concept [of music]” (2005:21). As ethnomusicology has developed, scholars in the field have become increasingly concerned with the way terminology reflects our inclusion of those musics we represent (see Powers 1980 and Browner 2000 for examples). Consequently, the use of local definitions of musical concepts has become somewhat commonplace in ethnomusicology articles and other forms of literature. These direct and indirect acknowledgments of the potential of particular terminology to communicate musical concepts is similar to discussions concerning language’s impact on human understanding as a whole. Gadamer asserts that, since experiences of the world are often presented to us through language, learning a language has the capacity to introduce a person “to a particular orientation and relationship to the world as well” (2004:440). Similar ideas concerning language’s ability to transmit orientations toward the world have been popularized in interpretations of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis. Whorf’s essay on how terminology might subtly affect perceptions of time and degree of danger (1974) has helped to illustrate how language might “predetermine for us certain modes of observation and interpretation” (Sapir 1995:46). Regarding Zhuang perception of music, we can see that wider categorical words such as “music” in English or *yīnyuè* 音乐 (music) in Mandarin Chinese are not important categories of meaning in Zhuang discussions of song and sounds associated with ceremony. However, the Zhuang do distinguish between

different divisions of fien and between the verbs that are commonly used for different modes of vocalization.⁶³

Terminology and Song Structure

Divisions in fien are typically expressed through measure words and adjectives that are frequently paired with fien. Adjectives, which occupy the possessive/descriptive space of the right periphery of noun phrases, can modify fien to refer to both the entirety of traditional shan'ge in a given area and the subdivisions of shan'ge categories. For example, the traditional singing in the northern areas of Tianyang and Tiandong are commonly referred to as “fien Dianzou.” Another kind of shan'ge in the south of Tianyang county would be referred to as “fien Pohong,” Pohong being a township nestled in the mountains just south of the center of Tianyang. Fien can also be used to refer to particular sets of song lyrics. As discussed in the previous chapter, songs of introduction (fien ciaz), flower songs (fien va), and songs of mutual love (fien doengh aeu) are all subcategories within the fien sung in the area of the Tianyang song tune.

Smaller subdivisions in fien are normally expressed with measure words that join with fien. There are two measure words commonly used with fien, which can also function as nouns. The first is the word *coenz*, which can mean a sentence, a paragraph, or an utterance. In fien a single *coenz* is typically an instance of fien sung from the opening iteration to the end of the closing iteration. However, it can also cover categories of fien as well. Sentence 1 below could mean a single utterance from a singer performing the flower song, or it could mean the entire set of utterances between male and female singers.

⁶³ Much of the information for this section comes from classes with Qin Jindun and Ling Yurong and conversations with Huang Wenke that occurred between early May and late August 2018. I was able to use what I learned from these classes and discussions to review two major interviews conducted in Zhuang (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018 and Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin 2018) for examples of how many of these terms occur in natural speech.

1. coenz fien va ndi ding

CL: utterance fien flower good listen This utterance of fien va sound good

The second measure word, *hot*, is listed in the standard dictionary of Zhuang dialects as the measure word for a traditional song (*Zhuangyu tongyongci yu fangyan daibiaodian cihui duizhao huibian* 1998). However, in conversations and interviews with informants, *hot* most commonly referenced one or two lines of text. Furthermore, when the dictionary of Zhuang dialects defines top and bottom lines of a couplet, the word *hot* is also used as the noun for line (see Examples 2 and 3).

2. hot gwnz

line above

3. hot laj

line below

In attempting to clarify the scope of these words with two informants, I received contradictory answers. One felt that *hot* was a smaller unit than *coenz*, and that one could even ask how many *hot* are in a given *coenz* of fien. The other felt that both referred to the same unit size and could not be used in that manner. Both informants encouraged me not worry too much about specific meanings as the scope of each word might vary depending on the speaker. Despite these conflicting accounts of which particular words are used to subdivide fien, what can be seen is that phrases of lyrics and lines of text are divisions that are overtly expressed in the Zhuang language.

While most of the vocabulary used to discuss fien relates to its lyrical content and subdivisions, there are also a couple of ways to discuss the melody of fien. When referring to the melody of a song, a Zhuang speaker will either use fien, or, when singling out melodic and

timbral characteristics, the word for humanly produced sound, *hing*. For example, Sentence 4 demonstrates a common way to express dissatisfaction with the tonal quality of the song tune:

4. gei hing nix, naeuh baenz hing

CL sound this NEG enough sound This sound [is] not enough [of a] sound

Adjectives and phrases modifying *hing* typically have functions in other areas of life. *Naoh baenz* in the sentence above is often used to say “not good enough” in most other domains.

Sounds can be sharp or painful, expressed in the adjective *sep*, which, when combined with the measure word for tool means “hook,” or literally “tool of sharp pain.” Sounds can also be soft (*un*) or hard (*ndongx*), which has implications with regard to the way the traditional melody is sung and ornamented, and typically has parallels in speech. One can also speak with a hard or soft tone. A voice that is hoarse (*lep*) is this way both in speech and in song.

Vocalizing Terminology and Verbs

While the nouns *fien* and *hing*, along with the adjectives, measure words, and possessives that join with them, give a foundation for understanding how the Zhuang view *fien* on different scales, verbs provide a clearer picture of how *fien* might be separated from other modes of vocalization. *Fien* can be spoken or sung, and the literature of *fien* can be changed or created by a talented singer. Like the words that join to *fien* and *hing*, verbs that are associated with *fien* are typically used in other contexts outside traditional singing. However, verbs that are paired directly with *fien* do not necessarily have the same kind of relationship with other forms of vocalization. This can be illustrated in a brief comparison of some of the verbs paired with speaking and singing from outside traditional Zhuang culture, the *dangzvuengz* melody, Daoist

or buxmo religious ceremony, and fien. I start with the verb with the broadest musical meaning, a verb meaning “to sing,” *ciengq*.

Ciengq is a cognate of the Chinese verb *chàng* 唱. In Mandarin, *chàng* is often used in a verb-object form *chàng gē* 唱歌, or “to sing a song.” When *ciengq* is used in the Zhuang language, it often uses this same verb object compound with the Zhuang cognate for *ge*, the noun *go*. As a compound, *ciengq go* most often refers to singing a song that is outside traditional Zhuang music. However, while the cognate for song, *go*, still mostly refers to music outside Zhuang culture when used by itself, it is not uncommon for *ciengq* to take multiple kinds of traditional singing as its object.

5. goz ciengq fien

I to sing fien

6. de ciengq dangzvuengz

he to sing dangzvuengz

Ciengq, like *chàng* in Mandarin and *sing* in English, refers primarily to the melodic component of the song. Despite being able to apply to a number of genres, though, *ciengq* is not used in reference to the religious ceremonies of the daogong or buxmo priests.

Gueg is one of the most common words used in conjunction with fien. Indeed, the verb-object combination *gueg fien* could be seen as the traditional song equivalent of singing a song in Chinese (*chàng gē*). *Gueg*’s literal meaning is “to do,” and it is often paired with a number of other words unrelated to fien in normal conversation. One can *gueg gong* (do work), *gueg caemz* (do play), and *gueg liu* (do travel) in addition to doing fien. However, despite the broad usage of the verb *gueg*, it cannot be used with words related to speech, or with other musical forms including modern songs and other traditional genres such as *dangzvuengz*.

7. goz gueg fien

I to do fien

8. *goz gueg dangzvuengz⁶⁴

I to do dangzvuengz

9. *goz gueg go

I to do song

This is in contrast to *ciengq*, which can be used to describe singing both traditional songs and songs sung in contemporary globalized genres. Gueg, despite having a broad association with other aspects of Zhuang life, has a narrow scope of meaning in its reference to music.

Like *gueg fien* and *cieng go*, the most common phrase for speaking also has a verb object pairing, *gangj va*, where *gangj* is the verb for speak, and *va* is a cognate to the Mandarin *hua* 话, which means word(s). *Gangj* can also be paired with the word for village (*gangj doj*), which means to speak Youjiang Zhuang or, more literally, the language of the village. However, *gangj* cannot be paired with *fien* or other types of singing even when the lyrics are spoken. This is despite the common occurrence of spoken *fien* when a more experienced singer is giving lyrics to a younger person to sing, or when an older singer wants to share lyrics, but is embarrassed to sing. This does not mean that *gangj* can never be used to describe this situation, rather that it cannot form a verb-object pair in these situations.

Other words applying to more specific kinds of vocalization categories can be paired directly with *fien* and other kinds of music. *Doq*, a word meaning “to change [something already said or written down]” can apply to stories and refer to improvising lyrics when paired with *fien* in the

⁶⁴ Asterisks are used in linguistics to mark constructions considered by native speakers to be ungrammatical or not used in their language.

combination *doq fien*. *Dog* can pair with both *fien* and the word for book (*sw*), in both cases meaning to speak aloud. To *dog fien* is to speak the lyrics for another person to sing and frequently refers to an older, more experienced singer providing lyrics for a younger singer to learn. Another word that can form a verb-object combination with *fien* is the verb *damz*, meaning “to mumble.” While all of my informants agreed this word could be paired with *fien*, Professor Qin asserted that to *damz fien* was to sing *fien* (2018h), and Ling Yurong and Huang Wenke said that to *damz fien* was to speak it (Ling 2018c and Huang 2018d). More importantly, they agreed that, relative to music, these words—*doq*, *dog*, and *damz*—could only be paired with *fien* and no other kinds of traditional or contemporary styles of singing. In fact, even words for speech such as *va* or *doj* are not paired with these words. Outside these verbs, there is one other verb that is significant for its use in a religious context.

Mo is a word meaning “to mumble,” but it is primarily associated with traditional forms of Zhuang religious music, and possibly the dangzvuengz tune. In everyday speech, *mo* can be used both for describing speech characteristics and to refer to the chanting that is done at Daoist rituals or the rituals of the *buxmo* priest. Indeed, the latter name is a combination of *mo* with the measure word for person, *bux*, meaning that the word *buxmo* could be translated as “one who mumbles” or “one who chants.” Furthermore, there appears to be an element of time associated with the meaning of *mo*; for example, Sentence 10 could be translated into English as “every day, I ramble/mumble into your head and ears, [but] you don’t listen” (Qin Jindun 2018d).

10. ngoenz ngoenz dox mo haeuj zaeuj, haeuj liang mengz bae, mengz dox nauz ting
 day day all mumble in head in ear you go you all not listen

Here, the concept of mumble is connected with the idea of telling someone something over and over again. This usage would seem to overlap with religious ceremony, where words are not only

said in a rapid and unclear manner, but also occur over a long period of time. This might also explain why, in at least one circumstance, I heard *mo* refer to the dangzvuengz song collection. However, while this word can be used for religiously related music and possibly for the dangzvuengz songs, it does not extend to *fien*.

The significance of the usage of these verbs and verb-object pairs is that it shows a separation of kinds of music and vocalization at the linguistic level in ways that we would typically not see in English. For example, we typically use the verb “to sing” in any context where there is singing. For Zhuang, *ciengq* does cover most musical forms of vocalization, but it is not used for describing singing in the context of Daoist or bumox ceremony. Colloquially, if we say someone “does” music, it does very little to narrow the genre of music. In Zhuang, this is only used for one kind of vocalization. Words such as “mumble” or “improvise” might help us narrow the kind of music we are talking about in the West; however, in our culture, most styles of music can be improvised and even mumbled. In Zhuang, these modes of vocalization appear to have sharper boundaries, which reflect divisions between music from inside and outside Zhuang traditional culture and between kinds of music that would be used by common people and priests. In a similar manner, the divisions of music by loose definitions of paragraphs and lines correlates with the expressed importance of lyrics and the singular tunes that are associated with *fien*, *dangzvuengz*, and religious ritual. The melody itself is categorized, not musically, but as a kind of humanly generated sound. Although melodic contour is important, since it forms the basis of the song tune, tonal elements are a more common means of talking about the melody because the song is already known. These ways of talking about music provide a good foundation to begin listening to how the Zhuang talk about their music.

Zhuang Singing in the Lives of the Singers

Before moving to examine how the Youjiang Zhuang talk about fien, it is helpful to introduce some of the people who gave generously of their time to help me understand their music. In recalling different experiences of fien, I include voices from across the spectrum of experience. Some of my informants have only had a basic level of interest in fien, singing an occasional strophe from time to time. Others are well-known singers and have preserved their lyrics in written form. Taking seriously accounts and opinions about singing across this spectrum of experience provides a balance of those who have known what good fien is through lived experience and those who can describe fien in a more direct and technical manner. For example, those who had a Sino-Western education, though not as capable in their abilities as singers, were much more likely to spend time discussing the meaning of fien lyrics, because they would have been exposed to doing similar kinds of activities in school. Those who were more experienced could sing more lyrics with more rhymes and deeper references to the literature of fien, which are all marks of a good singer. This does not mean that the more talented singers were incapable of giving good answers to questions, or that those who were not as involved in fien could not come up with a good strophe of lyrics. Rather, these statements reflect general trends observed across a variety of interactions concerning where I was most likely to get different kinds of information about fien. It is with this in mind, that I present six different short sketches of the Zhuang I spent the majority of my time with in the course of my research.

Fien Singers

Huang Mingya (黄明亚), who was born in the mid to late 1940s, grew up in what is now considered Tianyang's old city. Huang's mother was a well-known singer, a "song king"

(gēwáng 歌王).⁶⁵ He began singing at the age of 13 because of listening to his mother participate in a singing competition. After practicing and singing for his mother and grandmother, Huang went to study under another song king, who lived in a nearby village. At the age of 18, Huang went to live at his house, where he would learn to study the entirety of singing fien. Huang mentioned that, even during his youth, only about one third of his acquaintances growing up sang shan'ge because many of them went to school. Huang's singing brought him to the attention of the head of the culture bureau, who was interested in young people who could sing shan'ge and invited Huang to participate in cultural activities. Huang emphasized multiple times that his passion for singing was what enabled him to participate in the cultural activities despite only having a grade school education. This same desire to sing helped him start again at the end of the Cultural Revolution (Huang, Pan, and Qin 2017).

Huang Wenke (黄文科), who was born in the early 1940s, is originally from Sanlei, near the current location of the Tianyang Airport. Both Huang and his older brother began singing at a young age. They often went to nearby villages to find women to sing with and regularly attended the annual singing fair at Ganzhuang Mountain. Huang's older brother even dropped out of school so he could sing. Huang and other friends learned how to sing from an older singer, whom they would meet as often as he was available in the evenings. Huang mentioned that a smart person could learn a song and have it memorized each time they met, and that a slow person would take two times before the song was memorized. He moved to Baise in 1959, where he continued to sing, and even walked back to Tianyang for Spring Festival for more opportunities. A farmer by trade, Huang also sells VCDs of traditional singing in a local market

⁶⁵ This term is borrowed from Mandarin. While it's possible that the metaphor for an excellent singer might exist (though I have not come across it), the term "song king" is not a part of traditional Zhuang singing culture. Also, while the term *wang* usually refers to a male ruler, Huang uses it in a non-gendered sense in this example.

in Baise and has written down a collection of song lyrics using a version of Zhuang character script, which he uses to teach local Zhuang how to sing better (2018b, 2018e).

Huang Miaofan (黄妙翻), who was born around 1954, is from the township of Suolüe in Tiandong. Huang could sing most of her repertoire by the age of 15. She recalls that her mother used to teach young singers, who would come to their house to learn. She married into Professor Qin's family in the mid-1980s. Likely due to the proximity of her birth to the Cultural Revolution, Huang never participated in public song contests or antiphonal singing. Aside from a few performances of wedding songs, most of Huang's repertoire has been private. However, she has preserved some of her singing through having her husband use a locally available mp3 recording device to store some of her songs (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018).

Liao Xiuzhen (廖秀珍), who was born around 1944, is a resident of Longhe village on the outskirts of the city of Tianyang. Liu began singing at the age of 18. As with Huang Wenke, during her youth, singing was mentioned as the chief form of entertainment for her and those she grew up with. Young men would come to her village, and the young women would go to sing with them at the outskirts. A few years ago, Liu began compiling a collection of her lyrics, using a written form of Zhuang script. Liu also has multiple stories from the dangzvuengz collection of epic songs (Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin 2018).

Ling Yurong (凌玉荣), who was born in 1956, while not a singer to the degree of the previous Zhuang mentioned, is still from a group of Zhuang who can understand singing through being exposed to it at a young age. From Longping Town near the center of the city of Tianyang, Ling is a very capable entrepreneur, honing these skills through knowing which crops to grow for local sale; she now uses these skills primarily to sell insurance. When Ling was young, she would regularly hear performances of shan'ge by large groups of people near her home due to

her grandmother's interest in singing. She would often watch the shoes of the singers, who would change into a pair of embroidered footwear to sing in. Ling refers to people who learned to sing in her generation as people who learned because it was a hobby, in contrast to the previous generation where most people knew how to sing. While she does not regard herself even as one who sings as a hobby, Ling has occasionally improvised short songs (Ling 2018c, 2018d).

Qin Jindun (覃金盾), who was born in 1969, is similar to Ling Yurong in that, while he cannot sing on the same level as the others, he is still very familiar with the culture and literature of shan'ge and can understand much of the content of shan'ge lyrics. I have also heard him put together song lyrics and sing them on rare occasions. Coming of age after the Open Door Policy, Qin has both lived through the dramatic lifestyle improvements that have been made increasingly available throughout China and through the dramatic shift away from traditional culture. When he was young, he recalls walking with his family from Tiandong to the song fair at Ganzhuang Mountain. The journey took six hours, and they would stay there for a couple of days before returning home. Qin also learned to compose lyrics for short shan'ge songs while joking with friends and older Zhuang. This knowledge faded to a degree when Professor Qin studied at Guangxi University and began teaching at what is now Baise University. In recent years, as an extension of his research, Qin has begun to sing again and has expressed interest in learning to sing the dangzvuengz stories from his parents (2017a, 2017b, 2018c).

Cultural Aspects of Singing: Fien Ideals

Much of how these Zhuang and their acquaintances talked about fien when I was present was framed by the questions I asked. At the same time, a significant amount of useful information

came from when informants deviated from the topics on my sheet of paper to talk about an experience, answer a question that was changed through rephrasing by a translator, or make conversation with another person in the room. It was also not uncommon for these changes in topics to become new lines of inquiry, which would frame other conversations. This interplay between questions and talk outside the organization of my interviews creates a variety of contexts for exploring the words and concepts introduced above and highlights different aspects of how the Zhuang view fien. I organize these conversations into discussions of ideals of fien performance and how these ideals have been remembered.

One of the clearest statements made regarding what makes a good song was made in an interview with Huang Miaofan and some of the members of her village. Professor Qin assisted with this interview and, knowing that I was interested in both melody and lyrics, changed my broader questions of how to do (gueg) fien well to a question of what is more important for singing good fien, having a good sound or changing (doq) fien well. Huang asserts, “if you change (doq) fien when you do (gueg) it, but your sound is not good, this is not enough; it is sounding good and changing (doq) that is enough. If you only know one kind [of fien] well, this is also not enough. If you know how to change (doq) but you do not bend the sound, this is also not good” (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018). In addressing ideals pertaining to lyrics, there are two aspects of Huang Miaofan’s statement that are important.

The first is the way the verb doq is used. Professor Qin changed my original wording from gueg to doq. While both verbs can be used with fien, the meaning of doq (to change or improvise) is more closely associated to action pertaining to the lyrics. A similar sleight-of-hand in word choice can be seen in the Zhuang used in Huang’s answer in Example 11.

11. gueg fien nix doq

to do fien this to change [if] you change doing fien

Here, to change (doq) fien that is being done (gueg) is the positive element that is incomplete if the sound is not good. This reflects what others have expressed to me about good singers, that they can use their surroundings or characteristics of the people they are singing with to add to the songs they are singing. We see another important aspect of the use and meaning of doq when Huang gives the opposite example (of the sound being good, but the lyrics being insufficient). Rather than saying the songs are changed poorly, Huang notes that only knowing one kind of fien is not enough. Indeed, during much of my interview with Huang and others around her, there would be occasional discussion concerning what kinds of fien they were familiar with. This is important to the word doq because, even though it can be translated as “to improvise,” its meaning is more closely associated with changing what already exists. When kinds of fien are discussed, what is typically being discussed is a body of lyrics, or a common lyrical pattern that is already established. With this understanding, we can assert that good lyrics are ones where a singer can freely give new expression to the existing bodies of fien lyrics.

Other elements of good fien lyrics that came up in conversations and interviews included technical aspects of fien such as rhyme and the ability to sing long strophes, the number of traditional lyrics included in song, and the ability to get those watching to interact in a positive manner. Both Huang Wenke and Professor Qin referred to rhyming as a key part of fien. Length of song and strophes also came up in multiple experiences. On one occasion, when Huang Wenke and I were singing across from an older woman who was providing lyrics for two other women singing with her, Huang commented that her ability to sing longer strophes belonged to more traditional singers. Huang Miaofan also observed that improvising (doq) fien for long

strophes is a difficult feat because it is easy to lose one's way (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018). However, in the end the audience is the ultimate judge of content. When teaching me how to sing, Huang Wenke mentioned multiple times how we would know if we were doing well if the audience responded with laughter. When discussing one of the VCDs with Professor Qin, I brought up the fact that a singer I had shown it to had criticized it. Qin responded by observing that this could be due to the lack of rhymes used, but mentioned that it didn't matter much in this case because of the quality of responses between male and female singers (2018d). While rhyme and length can certainly indicate the ability of a singer, the quality of the content and the ability to gain a positive response from spectators speak the loudest of one's ability to doq fien.

The second part of Huang Miaofan's summary of the relative importance of tune and lyrics is the way the melody is discussed. Consistent with the vocabulary discussed above, Huang uses the word *hing* (sound) when she talks about the song tune, evaluating the sound in terms of overall quality and in terms of style. While Huang simply uses a good/not good (*ndi/naoh ndi*) dichotomy to describe sound quality, there are general ideas of what tonal qualities are suitable for singing. Regarding timbre, sounds that are hoarse (*lep*) or sharp (*sep*) are regarded as undesirable for singing. Since many older Zhuang have voices that are considered hoarse, or unclear, when they sing, many do not sing in public. Most of the older people I talked to and interviewed were not interested in singing for this reason. In contrast, singing soft (*un*) or having a tone like an *erhu* is regarded as a good sound. These two descriptors do not only have timbral significance, but can also be a way of describing ornamental characteristics as well. Objects that can be described as *un* include the inner parts of plants and soft pastries. Having a soft sound (*hing un*) means to have more of a legato feel between notes, to have more fluidity between note boundaries, and to make sure the ending vocable (*laen*) is present. A similar meaning is

Liao Xiuzhen: We didn't have television, we didn't have anything; it was only doing
(gueg) fien.

Su: That time must have been happy living and meeting together.

Liao: We didn't have lightbulbs, our village was poor. (Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin
2018)

Another indicator of contrast between the past and the present can be seen in the following
simple song lyric:

13. daengz mbanq goj miz gen
to arrive village also to have to eat

This particular line is often used to praise the prosperity of a given location. Other phrases that might be used in similar situations include talking about fruit trees surrounding the roads and the village, the quality of education, and other indicators of wealth. However, everybody having enough to eat demonstrates that, during the times this has been a popular lyric, not having wealth has the potential meaning of not having enough for everyone to eat. When discussing this line with Professor Qin, he mentioned that when he was young, eating meat primarily happened on special occasions (2017b). This is significant because it further emphasizes the correlation between a higher potential for living in poverty and being closer to the times when shan'ge was most popular.

However, while the economic conditions of the past are viewed in a negative light, shan'ge itself is still seen as a positive influence in the lives of the Zhuang, a way to escape the difficult surroundings, and a form of entertainment. Huang Wenke reminded me multiple times that he and his friends would seek opportunities to sing fien every chance they could get. Ling Yurong corroborated this, mentioning that when she was young, the people who would take her to the

place where they sang would do so virtually every time it was not raining, and even at times when it was (2018c). They would typically leave not long after dinner as the sun was getting low in the sky. Even the women I interviewed who mentioned the difficult times of the past saw doing fien as something that was exciting. Huang Wenke would also tell me multiple times that one could not be unhappy while singing shan'ge, and that one could easily lose track of time while singing. This relationship between happiness and singing has been reinforced by comments made both by people who sing and those who are merely familiar with the culture of fien. Even when difficult topics, such as crop failure or the death of a family member, are subjects of songs, the singing can still be seen as a way to change one's feeling from sadness or frustration toward a better emotion. Professor Qin told me one of the most common reasons given for singing was "gai saem gai mbia," translated as "to change the heart and change the boredom" (2018d).

In looking at how fien has been discussed with me in terms of some basic ideas and key memories, there are two notable themes that have surfaced. The first is fien's relationship to mood. Fien is often judged by its influence on the surrounding listeners. If the surrounding listeners laugh, the singers know they are doing well. In the past, this kind of influence could extend beyond entertainment and be used as the basis for marriage between partners. Huang Wenke told me that when he was younger, a song exchange on a bus resulted in an exchange of a towel from one of the women and a mirror on a later occasion in return from one of the men. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these items are symbols of romantic attraction. Huang remarked that if the man had asked, the two could have been married (2018e). At the same time, though, singing these songs did not have to lead to marriage; they could be done for entertainment. One might rush to a house where a guest was and sing outside through the night,

sing with someone on the road or dress up to sing at a meeting place and not pursue anything further than song.

The second theme is the importance of correct singing in producing the desired feeling. While the response of the audience is the final determinant of what is or isn't a good song, this result does not mean that the rules and categories surrounding fien are not important; even though rules and categories have a degree of flexibility, they are essential to the make-up of fien and what makes the fien in one area distinct from another. When I asked the head of the Tiangyang Shan'ge Association, Pan Zheng'an, and Huang Mingya how to sing well, they replied in a similar manner to Huang Miaofan. Though this particular interview primarily used Mandarin, they used a word with a similar meaning to *doq* (biān 编) when talking about creating lyrics. Both also affirmed the importance of melody, with Pan asserting that "if the sound is not good, then [the song] doesn't have any meaning" and Huang Mingya noting the advantage younger singers have being able to sing clearly. Huang further observed that, since Pan is from a different tune area, each sings his respective tune better than the other (Huang, Pan, and Qin 2017).

Learning How to Sing

Another source of how the Zhuang view singing can be seen in my own casual and formal interactions with singers and listeners as I learned the basics of how to do fien. This section reflects the moment "when the horizons of the researcher's world are expanded to include at least some part of the world that the new music symbolically references" (Rice 1994:6). While my earlier analytical chapters reflect this expansion of musical understanding to a degree, this section reflects my attempt to take my analyses of fien and use them to perform fien for an audience to see what kind of response I received. As with my conversations above, there was a

part of this process that was governed by my research, and there were other parts that were outside of my control that restructured the way I approached my process of gathering information. Accordingly, I structure this section chronologically, dividing each period of time to discuss how I was learning fien and how people responded to my efforts.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I sought singers and listeners to teach me about the vocabulary used in fien. This way I could learn how to sing from my analysis of VCDs and attempt to join singers in the park once I had learned enough of basic singing patterns and lyric material. During this time, I would meet with Professor Qin with VCDs I had purchased from Huang Wenke, ask about vocabulary I did not understand, and verify what I did understand. I had also begun to transcribe iterations of the song tune on the VCDs and was starting to understand the basic structure. However, I was also beginning to find that the Zhuang I had studied over the three summers prior to my fieldwork was not helping my understanding of song lyrics. Some of the vocabulary was older or referred to traditions that are not typically a part of normal present-day life and conversation.

This realization of the difference between present-day conversation in Zhuang and the Zhuang used in song was also present in the responses to my early attempts to find other people to teach me about the meaning of song lyrics. Though I had reached what could be categorized as an advanced level of proficiency in the Youjiang Zhuang language, advanced does not necessarily mean fluent. The first of the older Zhuang I expressed an interest in learning fien to, including Huang Wenke, urged me to speak Zhuang better, implying that I should be fluent before learning how to sing. This aspect of speaking and understanding was also brought to my attention on another occasion when I was sitting at the local park in Baise listening to a group of singers. A woman walked up to me and asked me if I could understand what was being sung. I

told her I could only understand a little bit and, as she walked away, she told me that if I could not understand, the songs would not have any flavor.

Between the VCDs from Huang, Professor Qin's help in translating what I could not understand, and past research, I was able to gain a rudimentary idea of how to write a basic song. I realized that, in the short term, all I needed to do was create a short poem in a rhyme scheme that would fit with the melody. I also decided to make light of my foreignness and inability to speak fluent Zhuang. This was because I knew from past research that it was not uncommon for singers to use themselves as the subjects of jokes in song. Additionally, in my classes with Professor Qin, I had learned that forms of lower self-address, such as *coiq* (servant/slave) are also frequently used. Attempting to apply these principles resulted in a very simple, three-line, unfinished song (alternating grey shading indicates alternating melodic iterations):

Line 1: Goq dwg bux vaigoz
 Older brother is CL: person foreigner

Line 2: mbaeuq lox gueg fien ndi
 not know to do fien good

Line 3: gangj mbanx doh mbaeuq lox
 speak village all not know

The lines were meant for two repetitions of the melody, where lines 1 and 2 form the first couplet with the rhyme being between *vaigoz* (foreigner) and *lox* (to know), and line 3 was the start of an incomplete couplet. In order to finish this first example, I was trying to think of a word that rhymed with *lox* to finish the second couplet; I was also considering where to have a single-line phrase to add variety and of what lyrics to use for an ending phrase. I decided to

check my progress with Professor Qin, who suggested the following changes and additions to my unfinished song (marked with bold font).

Line 1: **louz** dwg bux vaigoz
 we are CL: person foreigner

Line 2: mbaeuq lox gueg fien **lai**
 not know to do fien many

Line 3: gangj mbanx (**de**) mbaeuq lox
 say village not know

Line 4: **gangj doj** (**de**) mbaeuq **bianz**
 to say Zhuang not skillful

Line 5: **saem sienz coh (lo de) hai hing**
 heart happy then to open tone

Line 6: **saem hai coh ciengq fien (ga lai liu eh)**
 heart excited then to sing fien

In the first two lines, Qin changed *goq* (older brother) to *louz* (we), which is a slight lowering of social position. Using the title of older brother in my case was running counter to trying to place myself below the person or people I would be singing to. Qin also finished my second couplet by rhyming *gangjdoj* (to speak Zhuang) with *lox* (to know). Line five placed a single line with a repetition of the melody, and both Professor Qin and I cooperated on putting together the closing line. Despite my needing a fair amount of help, Professor Qin was delighted with my effort and sent a video recording of me singing this short song to some of his friends on the Chinese social media app Wechat.

By the end of the week, multiple acquaintances of mine with no connection to each other had notified me of this video's circulation. In the months that followed, I was invited to be part of a documentary put together by Guangxi Television (Wu, Ning, Li, Ma, and Yuan 2018), was invited to sing at multiple staged performances, and was mentioned in one of China's propaganda newspapers (Zhou Shixing 2018). This video, and others that surfaced later, would completely change the dynamic of my research. The view of me as a foreigner who could not learn fien because he couldn't speak fluently changed slightly as the recording spread around. One day, while I was walking through the park to listen for people singing fien, a group of people asked me if I was the one on the recording. When I confirmed this, I was asked to sing something. Since the only song I knew was the one Professor Qin and I wrote, I sang through it once. Once I finished the song though, I was asked to sing another. As I was trying to come up with any words that might work, an older man came up to me and began to tell me lyrics and then started to sing together with me. We were quickly swarmed by people in the park wanting to see a foreigner who could sing fien.

At around the same time, I began studying singing with Huang Wenke. Much of the materials for my earlier analysis of fien had come from VCDs I purchased from him. When he offered to teach me more and I found out that his style of singing originated in Tianyang, I bought a book of lyrics from him and we began to meet once a week over a two-month period. As mentioned in previous chapters, our studies centered around a collection of lyrics, which Huang had written out in Zhuang script. He also recorded himself reading and singing the lyrics. I prepared for our lessons by transcribing the lyrics using a phonetic approximation of the Romanized Zhuang script. Although Huang knew I was not familiar with much of the vocabulary used in the lyrics he had written down, most of our time was spent singing the lyrics

together. Huang would read a line, or a section of lyrics, and then we would sing them together. Huang insisted that, if I could memorize half of the contents of his book, I could sing with other people at song fairs; if I could learn the entire book, I could teach people how to sing fien. When he noticed that I could at least sing along with other singers, Huang decided to invite me to sing with him at the annual song fair at Ganzhuang Mountain.

The reaction to my singing at the Ganzhuang Mountain Song Fair would set a pattern for all of the other song fairs I would visit in northern Tianyang and Tiandong. In the years prior to 2018, I would seek to minimize my presence at a song fair, find singers who were already being recorded, and add my own recorder to the mix. I would usually divide my activity between taking notes, monitoring the quality of the recording, and taking pictures of the surrounding area. At Ganzhaung Mountain though, Huang Wenke and I were two participants; during both days we sang with four different groups of singers. Each time we sang, we would attract a good deal of attention from people wanting to see a foreigner sing. While we were often surrounded by ten to thirty people, however, most people would come and listen for a few minutes and then walk away. When asked if I could sing by myself, Huang would insist that I could not sing, but was learning. Spectators would also occasionally offer snacks and might even offer to improve the place where we were sitting. When Huang left the second day of the festival, and I remained for the afternoon, I found that it was impossible to resume my former method of research. I could not go anywhere with singers without being asked to participate. This last change remained for the rest of the song fairs I visited. I could not go anywhere where the tune I was researching was sung without being asked to sing. Furthermore, if I could demonstrate I was the one in the video who sang the simple song about being a foreigner, people would expect or hope that I could sing

more. If this expectation was not fulfilled, I would still often be asked to sing again, but there would be a slight feeling of disappointment.

Being asked to sing at the song fairs I visited forced me to change my method from one that was based primarily in observation to a more participatory methodology. I found that, if I wanted to observe singing without constant requests to sing, I could achieve a compromise by waiting for an invitation from a more experienced singer to join his group. This method of participation helped me to pick out key phrases in a couple of singing genres, such as those used as opening lines for *fien va* and *fien doengh aeu*. As the song fair season drew to a close, I began to notice some of these patterns occurring in the song exchanges when I would sing in the park.

During this final phase of my fieldwork, there were a few noticeable reactions to me singing with people at song fairs and at the park. The first was that singers would often include my foreignness in their singing as an element of interest. This was often added on to existing lyrical tropes. For example, in a section elevating the women singers across from us, we might sing that Chinese women are very desirable, while American women are not. For songs of parting, we might sing that we have to get on an airplane to fly back to America. A second reaction was surprise that I could sing or speak Zhuang at all. There were several people who were impressed that I could sing the Youjiang melody in a clear manner and in sync with a traditional singer. A third reaction was one of indifference and/or disappointment. This typically came after discovering that, though I could vocalize the Youjiang melody, I was not capable of singing *fien* apart from singing along with a more experienced singer. As my stay in Baise was drawing to a close, a pair of singers who had sung with me and a capable partner on two prior occasions began avoiding me when another singer in the park wanted them to sing with us. Talking to Huang, I found out that part of this was due to the fact that singers avoid singing with each other

too much because it can become boring knowing what the other group will sing (2018e).

However, I had also heard them mentioning to another person that I was unable to sing fien. This would have contributed to their disinterest, since the lyrics they were responding to were not my own, but those of whoever I happened to be singing with.

Learning to sing fien and seeing the reaction of Zhuang friends and acquaintances reaffirmed many of the ideals of fien expressed in other conversations and made other aspects of fien clearer to me. The importance of the song tune and basic structural rules of fien can be seen in the attention I received for my singing attempt. Because I was a foreigner (and especially a white Caucasian male), I generated a good deal of interest, both because this kind of performance was not expected of me and because of the attention I could bring to a person letting me sing with him. Professor Qin's own initial interest in my singing was primarily because he did not expect me to be able to do the small amount I accomplished in the first place. At the same time, though, this attention would not have happened without my ability to understand the basic principles of how the melody works and how to put lyrics in the melody. However, any observers familiar with fien paying attention to my attempts at singing in the park or at song fairs would notice that I would trail slightly behind the singing of the person who was giving me the lyrics and would not always sing the right words. Professor Qin was quick to point this out to me as I performed with other singers. Likewise, although I was able to attract attention, I was not able to maintain it. My singing, while entertaining, was still not my own. I did not know the literature and could not reference it or sing about my surroundings in a way that would be interesting to another group of singers. While I could sing fien I still did not know (lo_x) fien.

Conclusion

Examining these different ways of speaking about and evaluating fien demonstrates that it is possible to see fien as something that is lived in and as something that might be a world to those who participate in it. That fien is considered as a way to “change the heart and change the boredom” provides a strong indication that encountering fien refigures one’s orientation toward the world. This is one of the primary reasons given for the value of fien for those who sing it. It is why fien is something worth dressing up and changing shoes for, stopping school for, staying up through the night for, and going out daily for. Fien’s influence on perceptions of time, its comparison to the television and computer, and its influence on mood are critical indicators that participation in doing fien is to place oneself into a different realm of experience. That the ideal form of fien is one that generates laughter from a surrounding audience further strengthens this concept of fien’s affective influence. That fien can affect mood in a positive way, even when singing about negative aspects of life, is a testament to how a “musical work achieves its ontological vehemence by expressing a mood” (Savage 2010b:220). But how does the melody of fien contribute to this affect? We have already acknowledged that encounters with other worlds result in a refiguring of our experience, and that music demonstrates its worlding quality in its retreat and return to what we experience as reality. As Roger Savage observes, “music’s distance from the real exemplifies the paradox that the further the retreat, the more forceful the return and the deeper the bite” (2010a:109). For Savage, this process is made accessible through the configuring of musical events in a fitting way into an intelligible whole. Combined with its journey from and back to reality, this “suitability of the world that is expressed by a work testifies to a possible modality of inhabiting the world” (Savage 2010a:115).

However, while this is an excellent analysis of how music worlds in forms where the creation of unique progressions of sound is of primary importance, the melody of *fien*, with its fixed frame, presents a challenge to the above assertions. This is because good *fien* is not necessarily about “a mastery of compositional materials, methods, and techniques” of producing melodic, harmonic, timbral, or rhythmic forms (Savage 2010a:114). Being able to sing well is important, but a good singer of *fien* is not trying to create new configurations of musical events, but is trying to create configurations of lyrical events that are brought to full realization through a single tune. A good *fien* singer is not usually the one who can sing the most melodies or who can stretch the melodic frame the furthest. Differences in tunes are what separates *fien* from other kinds of musical activity and from other geographic locations. Differences in the lyrics are what determine different works or categories of works for the *fien* singer, which can be seen in the common measure word for both song and utterance, *coenz*. Additionally, although I have heard lyrics recited without melody, I have never heard a traditional singer vocalize the tune without words.

At the same time, though, we cannot go to the other extreme of claiming that affect in *fien* is purely generated through the construction of the lyrics. That *fien* is “not enough” without certain melodic or lyrical characteristics highlights the interdependence between lyrics and melody that exists in *fien*. Something critical is missing when the lyrics of *fien* are recited without the song tune. For example, the attention given to me, as a foreigner, singing *fien* would not have happened just by reciting the lyrics to what I sang. The lyrics would not have had the same impact or force. Furthermore, it is true that lyrics are often recited and written down; however, this is always with the intention of having the lyrics sung. Even though the older people I

interacted with would often recite lyrics, their memories of fien and the times of excitement they recalled were of singing.

It is the lyrics that the singers and audience interact with, that give newness, that are responded to emotionally. However, it is the melody that gives these lyrics their full expression. Its function in fien is similar to Heidegger's description of the temple-work, which "in setting up a world, does not cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time and to come into the Open of the work's world" (1971:44-45). In order for the lyrics to be fully present to the singer, they must be placed in the song tune. They are not truly present until coupled with melody. A singer does not respond to another singer's lyrics until they are sung. Revisiting Savage's writings on the worlding qualities of music, while melody in a given work fien does not present us with the specific mood for each individual work (which is given by the lyrics), it is what gives each coenz a sense of being a "temporally synthetic whole" (2010a:113). It is also what allow for the withdrawal of the lyrics from their normal soundscape, which is replaced, or at least augmented, by the sonic frame belonging to Tianzhou fien.

CHAPTER 6: CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD FIEN

How has the Zhuang relationship with fien changed over time? Can these changes tell us anything more about the hypothesis proposed for this dissertation? Is there any way this hypothesis can help bring clarity to the current situation? Up to the present, I have primarily discussed genres of music that have existed among the Zhuang for multiple centuries. Although I do discuss kuaiban, which is a much more recent form of music among the Zhuang, it is still more similar to non-Western forms than those that entered Zhuang culture in the 1900s. As with most traditional⁶⁷ genres in Zhuang culture, fien has seen a dramatic decrease in use and popularity since the middle of the twentieth century. Currently, there are very few younger Zhuang who can sing traditional styles of music. This is especially true in city areas, though in the countryside there are still some youth who can sing fien. Many of the song fairs I have gone to, which used to have large numbers of singers, now only have a few, and even they do not sing for as long as they did in the past. For the most part, younger Zhuang do not use singing for enjoyment, building potential romantic relationships, or to “change their hearts and change boredom.” Many Zhuang I have interacted with have stated that television, phones, and computers now take on those roles.

The music younger Zhuang have learned in school and through modern media has been sinicized variants of Western classical music and Western popular music, and new forms of music that have been heavily influenced by globalized culture such as Chinese popular music. The way the themes develop, and the common song forms, more closely resemble the music of

⁶⁷ I use the term “traditional” with the knowledge that it can be used to ignore living examples of cultural progression and to stereotype cultures using what has existed in the past. However, because of the drastic changes that have occurred in the past century, I join Helen Rees in using the adjective “traditional” “to [characterize] those living art forms already current in China before the substantial influx of Western cultural, aesthetic, and material influence in the early twentieth century” (2012:49n5).

the West than the traditional music of the Zhuang. Moreover, the vocal timbre, ornamentation style, and modes used in contemporary composition are drawn from what has become a relatively standardized form of Chinese musical and vocal performance. Although these latter elements have a foundation in some forms of Chinese music, they are often quite different from fien in practice. Contemporary musical forms are no longer based around single narrow frames, but are constructed on the basis of Western-derived scales and key changes, and on works that feature multiple melodic themes. The lyrics of songs listened to and sung by Zhuang youth are almost always in Mandarin or Cantonese. Furthermore, the amount of lyrics in a given song is much less than what would be expected in a typical performance of fien.

This dramatic shift in musical knowledge does not seem to bother many older Zhuang I have met, who see fien as something that was part of their experience, but not necessarily something that needs to be passed on. Part of this is likely due to the positive changes that have come with the exponential growth in China's economy. In the above short discussion of how fien is remembered, I observe that older Zhuang singers recall their experience of fien fondly, but not the living conditions that existed during that time. As the living conditions have improved and the practice of doing fien has faded, this trading of the world of fien for the present living conditions is not seen as a bad thing.

In this chapter, I move from describing how fien exists in memory, language, and literature to how the music of the Youjiang Zhuang exists in the present. This involves updating the musical context of fien to include modern popular music and staged performances. It also means examining how fien itself is currently viewed, preserved, and performed. I address these issues through examining the key historical events that have contributed to the formation of contemporary Zhuang culture, discussing efforts to revive fien and other traditional forms of

Zhuang music making, and making observations on the current state of the music of the Youjiang Zhuang.

Modern Historical Influences on Zhuang Culture

The 20th century was a time of drastic change in China and Southeast Asia (Miller and Williams 1998b), full of warfare and transitions between multiple forms of government. This period also saw some of the greatest increases in the influence of Han Chinese culture on the Zhuang. As Jeffery Barlow observes, although much of Guangxi was sinicized by the start of the last century, the Zhuang of the western part of Guangxi “were still quite traditional” due to the isolation and rural location of most of the counties in this region (2005). This situation remained somewhat constant during the first half of the 20th century, since “what little infrastructure Guangxi had built was in shambles” (Kaup 2000:153) due to civil war and the Japanese push to connect its forces in China with those in Vietnam during the latter half of the Second World War. This situation would change drastically once the war was over. Katherine Kaup notes that over 26,800 kilometers of roads were added by the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (2000:153-154). While many of these roads were unsupervised peasant projects common to the Great Leap Forward,⁶⁸ this massive increase in infrastructure greatly increased contact with these remote areas. While connecting western Guangxi to the rest of China would bring unprecedented opportunity to the region, it would also result in massive upheavals in Zhuang tradition. The upheaval reached its climax with Chairman Mao’s attempt to remove the Four Olds (old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits) from China’s cultural foundation between 1966 and his

⁶⁸ The Great Leap Forward was a movement begun by Chairman Mao in 1958, which encouraged collectivization of property and industrial development. Its reliance on untrained labor and unscientific policies backfired spectacularly in the Great Famine of 1961 (see Dikötter 2010).

death in 1976; this resulted in the burning of traditional manuscripts, destruction of temples, and persecution of tradition bearers across China. While the Han Chinese had made efforts to oppose minority traditions in the past, with the improved transportation and the advent of the Cultural Revolution, the silencing of traditional forms of Zhuang music took place on a larger scale than at any other time in China's history. It is remembered by every traditional singer or musician I have met as a time when traditional forms of music could not be performed.

The decades following the Cultural Revolution saw several major shifts in government policy under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, one being that many minority customs were no longer suppressed. In 1980, China's Minister of Culture, Huang Zhen, put forward five points solidifying Chinese policy in support of minority tradition: first, the restoration of cultural cadres and artists suppressed during the Cultural Revolution; second, allowing minorities to have autonomy in their performing arts; third, applying party policy toward literature and the arts, while maintaining variety; fourth, building up cultural enterprises of minorities, including in remote areas; and fifth, promoting unity among all ethnic groups in China (summary taken from Mackerras 1984:191).

While this shift in policy would allow for folk revivals of traditional singing to occur in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, other world events would change the way Zhuang culture would be received by the following generations. With the opening of China to the global economy at the end of the 1970s and the further improvement of infrastructure in Guangxi, a flood of outside influences began to have an impact on younger Zhuang. Many young men traveled to the east coast of China to work in factories, and children of all ages began to attend schools, often away from home. As a result, many Zhuang have grown up in linguistic environments that are primarily Mandarin, and have grown up away from traditional cultural

events, such as singing fairs. This rapid change in culture has created a situation where a large number of young Zhuang growing up in some of the larger cities in Guangxi do not speak Zhuang (Bodomo 2007).⁶⁹ Furthermore, even in remote areas, one is hard-pressed in the second decade of the 21st century to find a person under the age of 25 who can sing traditional songs.

Although cultural cadres were restored after the Cultural Revolution and some aspects of traditional culture are mentioned in school curricula, these efforts have done little to stem the waning of traditional cultural among the Zhuang. Part of this is due to the fact that traditional forms of music have been largely excluded from staged performance and formal education, with incremental changes occurring only recently. Instead, song melodies have been treated more like themes to be developed in compositions with more melodic development and added harmonic structure. As Colin Mackerras observes, this “professionalization and its concomitants are resulting in the decline of the [ethnic minorities’] original traditional folk song and dance and replacing them with a more refined art that absorbs very important traditional elements selected according to the criteria of a Han-dominated socialist society” (1984:188). This “more refined art” finds its roots in the New Culture Movement that began in the mid-1910s, which came in response to the fall of the Qing Dynasty due to internal struggles and corruption, and multiple defeats at the hands of Western and modernized militaries.⁷⁰ China’s intellectuals felt that their decline was a failure to modernize not only their military, but also their culture. Musically, this growing attitude resulted in the embrace of Western culture on many fronts among intellectuals, leading “to a large-scale musical Westernization, regarded by Chinese intellectuals—then as well

⁶⁹ This issue of language loss is not at all unique to the Zhuang, but common throughout China, since Mandarin and English are seen as the most efficient linguistic means to achieve prosperity (see Zhou Minglang 2004).

⁷⁰ These defeats include the First and Second Opium Wars, which occurred during the mid-1800s, and the first Sino-Japanese War, a brief conflict lasting from 1894 to 1895 (see Mittler 2004).

as now—as routes to modernity” (Yang Hon-Lun 2017:2-3). This has contributed to many Chinese and educational institutions holding a negative view of traditional cultures, seeing them as backward. While the outright suppression of traditional music was largely over by the 1980s, this attitude—spurred on by an ideal of music professionalization taken from the Soviet Union—has continued to influence public pronouncements, state institutions, and urban middle-class culture ever since the beginning of the last century (Rees 2012:272).

The combined effects of the Cultural Revolution, the opening of China’s doors to the outside world, increased participation in formal education by younger members of society, and the attitudes of those in authority over policy and education caused a good deal of concern among those still valuing traditional music and culture at the end of the 1990s. Helen Rees observes that some of her Chinese colleagues during the 1980s and 1990s hoped for policies aimed at protecting traditional culture similar to those in Japan and Korea, since the policies in China at the time were “not conducive to preservation and encouraging of traditional arts,” while the rapid spread of electronic media further hastened the decline (2012:272). Zhang Xingrong, an avid collector of traditional music in Yunnan and a professor at the Yunnan Art Institute, lamented in a 1994 interview that, although one of the most unique features of Yunnan is its music, “the future does not look very promising” (Body 1995:66). Even some involved in the tourist industry at the time took notice of the dramatic changes in minority cultures, asserting a “real threat in China that minority traditions will be lost, or only seen and experienced in museum-like compounds” and urging “a greater sensitivity to, and support of, minority difference” (Zhang, Yu, and Lew 1995:240). While the political currents have shifted over the last two decades, the looming issue of rapid culture loss is still relevant to the long-term viability of traditional Zhuang culture. In a 2012 article concerning strategies of folksong protection among the Zhuang, Xu

Xiaoming observes that song types, local languages, traditional festivals, those who learn songs, and the ability of singing culture to spread are all still decreasing (2012:81). Although there are still people who were alive when traditional language and culture were more common, younger Zhuang do not have much exposure to these traditions. Adam Bodomo asserts that “in general, each time a Zhuang-speaking settlement develops into a modern centre of business and commerce it ceases to be a Zhuang-speaking settlement because more Han-speaking people come into the area and the new town turns into a Mandarin- or Cantonese-speaking town or city!” (2007). The gap between the older and younger generation concerning traditional singing was expressed to me very clearly by singer Liao Xiuzhen when she compared her experience of fien to the present: “If you knew how to sing this fien, then you would go out to have fun; from the first to the 15th day of the lunar month the moon would be bright enough to go out; it was very exciting. In the house, it would still be dark because there weren’t any lights; that’s how it was. But now, young people just watch TV” (Liao, Wei, Wei, Su, and Lin 2018).

Efforts to Prevent Loss of Culture Among the Zhuang

While the state of Zhuang traditional music and culture is still one of radical change and replacement, the attitudes present in policy and education have changed a good deal over the last few years. One of the clearest indicators of this shift in attitudes is China’s enthusiastic embrace of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) movement. The conservation of ICH finds its roots in the preservation of tangible artifacts and in legislation protecting culture passed in Japan in 1950 and in South Korea in 1962 (Howard 2012). As the United Nations became increasingly involved with making the protection of ICH an international project, labeling customs as ICH became an opportunity for countries to display their culture on the global stage. As a China was

experiencing rapid growth and was seeking to expand its influence at the turn of the millennium, the ICH movement became an opportunity to demonstrate the richness of Chinese culture in all of its forms, including those practiced by minorities. A major turning point in both the ICH movement as a whole and China's involvement in ICH in particular can be traced back to the three proclamations of UNESCO's Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001, 2003, and 2005 (Howard 2012, Rees 2012). As Rees observes, each successful nomination "was proclaimed in the Chinese media and viewed as an international and national Chinese triumph" (2012:26). China followed through with enthusiasm on both a national and international scale. It became the sixth nation to ratify, accept, or approve UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2004 and has more items on UNESCO's ICH lists than any other country in East Asia (Rees 2012). On the national level, China has also started ICH lists and related programs in support of cultural revitalization at multiple levels of government.

With its embrace of the international ICH movement, attitudes in China began to change from denigrating traditional cultures to providing full national support to participation in UNESCO's initiative. Helen Rees identifies four major factors influencing China's participation in UNESCO's ICH movement: first, China's participation in UNESCO's recognition of masterpieces of cultural heritage has enabled China to garner positive attention on the world stage; second, with the rise of the market economy, culture industries and tourism have brought economic value to folklore protection; third, China is able to connect its rhetoric promoting environmental preservation with cultural preservation; and fourth, the effects of globalization have created a longing for local, disappearing traditions (2012:44-45). These four factors not only represent reasons for China's involvement in international efforts toward cultural

preservation, but also represent reasons and methods applied locally as well. In this section, I identify efforts made toward preserving fien connected with the first three of these factors noted by Rees.

Participation of Fien and Related Cultural Items in National and Local ICH Lists

Up to the present, there have been four ICH lists at the national level in China, six lists at the autonomous region level for Guangxi, and six lists at the prefectural level for Baise. Each of these lists are divided into different categories of ICH, such as folk literature, dance, folk drama, folk medicine, etc. As the largest recognized minority, the Zhuang have figured prominently on these lists, often with items related to traditional singing. The first national list, released in 2006, includes the Liu Sanjie folk songs in the literature category, the shan'ge of the Zhuang in Napo County in the traditional music category, and Zhuang song fairs in the folk customs category (Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan wang 2018). Of additional importance to fien in this national list is the inclusion of the Zhuang ancestral deity, Buluotuo, in the literature category. While “literature” in this case is connected to the oral transmission of the Buluotuo scriptures, this recognition has provided another avenue for drawing attention to publications and cultural events, such as the song fair at Ganzhuang Mountain, which is associated with the worship of Buluotuo in Tianyang County. Other important items related to Zhuang singing culture include the liao songs of Pingguo County, which made the second national list in 2008, and the officially acknowledged date of singing festivals, the third day of the third lunar month (Sanyuesan), which was on the fourth national list in 2014 (ibid.).

At the level of Guangxi, Tianzhou shan'ge made the fourth list in 2013, along with the pai'ge of Youjiang District (Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu wenhua he luyou ting 2018). Both of these

items were also on the third city-level ICH list for Baise in 2012. This development is important to observe because, as noted in the second chapter, these two kinds of fien could be considered as at least having the same tune. Furthermore, the categories of songs used for the lyrics are also very similar, as discussed in the fourth chapter. This is not to say that everything about these two tunes is exactly the same. Dialect differences and subtle differences between the tunes might be enough to distinguish the fien finding its center in Longquan from the fien that has its center in Tianzhou. However, it does appear that they are related enough to each other that an administrative step may have been taken to avoid conflicts in claims. While the Tianzhou tune was selected for the folk music category, the pai'ge of the Youjiang district was selected for the folk literature category (Zhonggu falüwang 2012). For a more in-depth examination of the ICH application process, we can turn to the prefecture-level ICH application submitted by Tianyang County in 2012.

Tianyang County's application for prefecture-level ICH designation mentions Tianzhou shan'ge as one of five types of folksong in Tianyang County (Tianyangxian wenhua he tiyu ju 2012). The application itself contains a summary of the item, relevant contact and county information, a more detailed explanation of the item, grounds for inclusion of the item in the prefecture-level ICH list, management of the item, a plan for protecting the item, and a statement by local experts and government officials concerning the cultural importance of fien. Tianzhou shan'ge is explained in terms of its geographical location, historical origin, essential content, its inherent value, its level of endangerment, related goods and works, and inheritors of the tradition. These are used to establish the basic grounds for inclusion on the prefecture list, which include the long history of fien, its unique form, and the way that it has expanded both in terms of literature and in terms of geographic coverage. Protective measures and investments up to the

time of the application includes surveys, listing the tune as Tianzhou's important song type, conducting annual contests, investing in shan'ge activities at the Ganzhuang Mountain song fair, composing derivative works, and producing a segment for CCTV's "Min'ge Zhongguo" (Folksongs of China) television program. In addition to continuing these measures, the application proposes to increase the importance of singing activities and cultivating singers, training the younger generation to sing, and additional activities that will be discussed further below.

Connecting Fien to the Economy

One of the protective measures taken by the time of the application of Tianzhou fien for the prefecture-level list was to "develop a joining of song fair culture and tourism, expand its scope, and create a distinguishing regional culture industry brand" (ibid.). In addition to the potential gain of local, national, and international prestige provided by designating items as ICH, China has also sought to employ the variety of cultures inside its borders to strengthen its local and national economies. China's stance on this merger of economy and cultural preservation has been a part of Chinese governmental policy since 2003. China's build-up of a culture industry with cultural products and brands is seen not only as something that is critical inside the country, but also as essential to catch up with the influence that the cultures of other nations wield. This attitude can be seen in an early publication on China's culture industry policy, where it is asserted that

Chinese ancestors left a tremendous amount of cultural heritages for later generations and China's culture industry boasts huge development potential. However, China's culture industry still lags far behind that of some other countries due to restrictions of a less-developed society and economy. ("Rising WTO Challenges to Culture Industry" 2003)

This same attitude can be seen in recent papers written about shan'ge's role in the culture industry and in culture products in Guangxi. Yu Zhongmin asserts that shan'ge has played a central role in the economic growth and cultural preservation over the previous ten years. Tianyang's fien is one of the song-types referenced as being part of the "sea of songs" that has assisted efforts to invite outside investment into traditional activities (2012:24). Yu goes further to observe that derivative works based on shan'ge and shan'ge culture, such as the live action drama "Impressions: Liu Sanjie"⁷¹ and the International Folk Song and Art Festival, have injected billions of yuan into Guangxi's economy. However, Yu still sees Guangxi as being behind in the world economy and suggests increasing efforts to develop and promote shan'ge using "Impressions: Liu Sanjie" as an ideal kind of cultural product (2012).

This promotion of derivative works, which usually represent shan'ge through portrayals of courtship or through brief references to song melodies in compositions, is common in discussions of promoting shan'ge as a cultural product. For example, Huang Yuting from Guangxi's Wuming County Culture Center uses the example of Wuming's Nindani Children's Choir and their performances in other provinces and in Beijing as an example of how to create a cultural brand (2008). Like the examples given by Yu Zhongmin, although this choir sings using the Zhuang language, the musical forms are more at home in the choir rooms of schools favoring Westernized music or on the national stage than in traditional singing contexts. Furthermore, some of these derivative efforts, such as "Impressions: Liu Sanjie," have attracted the attention of researchers from other provinces exploring how to create and improve their own cultural brands (Jin and Kong 2014).

⁷¹ "Impressions: Liu Sanjie" is a live action drama based on the story of Liu Sanjie that takes place in Yangshuo County, Guilin. It involves dancing, acting, and musical components, which all take place on and around the Li River (Turner 2010).

Figure 6.1: A dance performance at the Buluotuo Cultural Tourism Festival in Tianyang County, Guangxi. Photo by author, 22 April 2018.



Figure 6.2: The walkway leading up to Ganzhuang Mountain during the Buluotuo Cultural Tourism Festival. Photo by author, 22 April 2018.



Derivative works and singing competitions are often employed alongside other larger tourist ventures where local specialty products (特产 tèchǎn) can be put on sale.

Modern song fairs typically double as large market places where tens of thousands of spectators can come, watch multiple events, and shop. For fien, the largest of this kind of collaboration

between ICH, tourism, and local agricultural products can be seen in the song fair that happens at Ganzhuang Mountain in Tianyang County, which is now also called the Buluotuo Cultural

Tourism Festival (Figure 6.1). At Ganzhuang Mountain, fien competitions function alongside a

Figure 6.3: Noodles advertised as intangible cultural heritage sold in the United States.



worship ceremony, bull fighting, and a firecracker ball to attract hundreds of thousands of tourists. Sales

booths line the walkway up to the mountain, which is packed with people during the first two days of the festival (Figure 6.2), and some years I have gone have

featured activities promoting tomatoes, an endorsed agricultural product of Tianyang. In a similar manner,

I was invited to sing fien at the Tiandong Mango Culture Festival this past year (2018) as part of larger

festivities focused around Tiandong's mango industry. When I returned to the United States, I received one

more reminder of the comfortable merger between ICH and economic opportunities when I stumbled across a package of dried noodles in a Chinese food store whose original taste was advertised as part of Guangxi's intangible cultural heritage (Figure 6.3).

Cultural Preservation through an Environmental Lens

A good deal of the terminology used to describe preservation of folk songs is borrowed from environmental preservation. For example, in the ICH application for Tianzhou shan'ge, the subcategory of "endangered situation" (濒危状况 bīnwēi zhuàngkuàng) under the item description, and multiple references to protection (保护 bǎo hù) parallel language that is also

used regarding animal and plant species. However, there is a more direct term tying these two forms of preservation together, 原生态 *yuánshēngtài*, meaning original ecology. As Helen Rees observes, while many of the terms that are shared between environmental and cultural protection are self-explanatory, “original ecology” requires more elaboration (2012). Applied to the culture of China’s minorities, *yuanshengtai* implies more than the concept of traditional music.

Regarding folksongs, Rees notes that “it emphasizes the environment in which the singing naturally occurs as well as traditional singing style, dialect, subject-matter, etc.” (2016:58). In Chinese academic discussion, the term is set against the timbral and structural modifications of folk tunes that have taken place through professional ensembles and conservatories. Qin Jindun echoes these points, stating that *yuanshengtai* singing is “in the midst of the production, life, and practice of the people, not created through professionalized training” (2011:103).

These facets can also be seen in a recent article concerning *yuanshengtai* musical characteristics and research value in the Tianzhou song tune by Liu Liping (2012). Liu asserts that the characteristics of “original ecology music” (原生态音乐 *yuánshēngtài yīnyuè*) include the diversity of tunes, languages, and lifestyles, and that the vocalization of *yuanshengtai* singing is distinct from the “scientific” way of learning (2012:179).⁷² In relation to the Tianzhou tune, Liu discusses the characteristics particular to the tune’s vocal quality, tune structure, and language used. However, it is important to note that much of the focus in this article is placed on elements related to the timbre and basic shape of the melody. The only other time the term *yuanshengtai* is used outside the introduction is in relation to the vocal characteristics used by

⁷² The “scientific” way of learning music refers to an approach toward art that was taken from Western classical music via the Soviet influence on China’s cultural policies. Under this influence, singing styles that drew from Western bel canto styles of singing and training techniques were considered scientific and forward-thinking, while the traditional vocal timbres were considered backward (see Rees 2016:55n4).

fien singers. Furthermore, the primary focus on the language characteristics is related to the sound of the language. There is not much focus on how the melody varies or on ornamentation.

This focus of *yuanshengtai* on certain vocal and linguistic sounds, with a limited focus on musical form and literature, can be seen in the 2010 televised performance of fien (CCTV *jiemu guanwang* 2010). In the ICH application for Tianzhou shan'ge, this performance is called a *yuanshengtai* rendition of fien (Tianyangxian wenhua he tiyu ju 2012). The singers are younger, but use the Zhuang language and vocal characteristics that are further removed from the professionalized ensemble renditions of traditional music and closer to what Liu Liping calls “simple, free, and unsophisticated” (2012:179). They are divided into two groups of singers, one male and one female, and sing lyrics about drinking. However, the melodies sung are a stock set of iterations sung in the same way, in the same order, and with the same number of iterations containing the same number of lines. In fact, the form of the melody and arrangement of the iterations in each utterance is the same as the example given in Liu's essay. I have seen one other performance of explicitly advertised *yuanshengtai* singing during the period of my fieldwork (excluding singing competitions), and this too had to make similar tradeoffs to work on stage. These compromises likely reflect Helen Rees' sense that “despite all the public rhetoric extolling original ecology folksongs, for many urban middle-class Chinese who have grown up with a heavily Western art music-influenced soundscape, it can be hard to appreciate some folksongs sung in the most ‘true-to-the-village’ versions of this style” (2016:74).

The Current State of Music Among the Youjiang Zhuang

The brief discussion of the concept of “original ecology” and the complexities of how it is used with fien provides a good segue for discussing the current musical environment fien has

found itself in. Because folksong styles that are “true-to-the-village” can be difficult for younger generations to digest, the modifications that occur during staged performances are often necessary to engage an audience unfamiliar with traditional practice. This is not only true of the Zhuang, but also of many ethnicities in China attempting to gain the attention of a younger population that does not understand the cultural forms that held sway before their time. As Catherine Ingram observes, younger singers of the Kam minority “now prefer those songs with greater melodic interest that usually feature in staged performances, rather than those songs with less melodic variety but deeper or more meaningful lyrics that are more highly regarded within the village context” (2012:64). Even for the yuanshengtai performance of fien mentioned above, it is simpler (and often just as effective for a studio audience) to memorize one version of the melodic part of an utterance of fien and repeat it, instead of trying to figure out the most likely configuration of the melody for a given set of lyrics. This interplay between the desire to preserve some part of traditional fien, or some part of Zhuang culture through music, in a rapidly changing contemporary context is a central part of examining Zhuang music in the present. It is driven by the historical events that have created a sharp divide between older and younger generations of Zhuang and by the potential for widespread attention, economic gains, and cultural protection that have fueled the ICH movement. These same influences have also had a role in shaping the way that fien is performed in the present. Though the musical and literary aspects have not changed as much for traditional performers, the places where singing takes place have seen a dramatic shift over the past few decades. For this reason, I will not only be examining the recently developed genres of Zhuang popular music and staged performances, but will also pay attention to how traditional performances of fien have changed.

Zhuang-Language Popular Music

Zhuang-language popular music began to emerge in the early 2000s as the internet made it easier to disseminate recordings of music to interested listeners. Qin Jindun marks the online release of southern Zhuang musician Li Weijie's "Yin tuoluo" ("Sound gyroscope") on the website "Zhuang zaixian" (Zhuang online) in 2004 as a watershed moment in Zhuang-language popular music (2010). At around the same time, the Zhuang performers in the Haliao Music Group—which gets its name from the liao songs of Pingguo County—began to record music on a path that would lead to national recognition. In Tianyang, a fresh Zhuang graduate from Guangxi Arts Institute, Wei Qingqing, gained local attention by taking the 1989 classic "Shan'ge" and giving it Youjiang Zhuang lyrics.⁷³ This trend would continue to grow rapidly, and, as Qin Jindun observes, after 2004 more and more Zhuang-language pop songs began to spring up "like mushrooms after the rain" (2010:108).

In general Qin observes that these songs fall into three different categories: those that mix traditional melodies with modern song forms, those that take existing Chinese pop songs and translate the lyrics into Zhuang, and those that take essential elements of traditional songs to make new music (2010:109). For the Youjiang Zhuang language, the majority of the songs have been overdubs of Mandarin pop songs with similar lyrics in Zhuang substituted. The most popular of the singers performing such items calls himself Liang Wuhui and posted thirty-nine Youjiang Zhuang language songs on his Youku channel between 2015 and 2017. These videos have earned him 105 subscribers and 142,000 views (916020261 Youku Channel 2019). Wei Qingqing, with her increase in popularity, has also been featured in a number of performances, including as a backup singer with the Haliao Music Group when they participated in CCTV's

⁷³ "Shan'ge" was written by Li Xiaoqi, with lyrics by Gu Di, and was first performed by the well-known singer Wei Wei (Cheng Jie n.d.).

biennial televised national young singer competition in 2010 (CCTV 2010).⁷⁴ The song she sang with the Haliao Music Group in the national semifinals, “Yueliang” (Moonlight), is a good example of Qin’s second category of pop songs, since sections of the song borrow the melody from one of the liao song tunes in Pinguo County. That same year, she sang a Youjiang Zhuang language song titled “She tian guo xiang” (The sugar cane is sweet, and the fruit is fragrant) for CCTV’s “Min’ge Zhongguo” segment featuring Tianyang (CCTV jiemu guanwang 2010).⁷⁵ This song is close to Qin Jindun’s third category of pop songs, those that take essential elements of traditional songs to make new music. The song opens with sung sets of vocables that bear a slight resemblance to those used in fien. Additionally, the lyrics are similar to those in Zhuang songs that praise villages, describing a scene of large and fragrant fruits covering mountains and valleys. The melody of the song also uses a similar set of pitch intervals to fien. However, while there are some minor similarities to fien, the pitch range, progression, song form, and rhythms used are all much closer to those used in popular music. The same can also be said for the simplicity of the lyrics and the lack of rhymes.

Although there have been a few music groups that have formed and a couple hundred songs produced, there have still been a large number of obstacles to a sustained popular music industry around Zhuang lyrics. For example, the two examples I gave above of Youjiang Zhuang singers cover the majority of Zhuang-language popular music that can be heard in this language area. Professor Qin asserts that the lack of consistent income, lack of roots in traditional culture, and the lack of marketing constitute severe hinderances to the progress of this trend (2010). Much of

⁷⁴ In Chinese, the name of this competition is *Quanguo qingnian geshou dianshi dajiang sai* (全国青年歌手电视大奖赛).

⁷⁵ This song was written by Rong Chuanwen, Wu Caixian, and Lin Weihong, with lyrics by Huang Yuzhen. Also, it is worth noting that the show this song debuted on is the same program that featured the yuangshengtai demonstration of fien.

the significance of these obstacles is rooted in the motivation of Zhuang artists and the nature of the Zhuang language. Many of the Zhuang artists start creating this music for their own enjoyment and are not necessarily concerned with creating some kind of business plan or intended cultural affect. Furthermore, even those who wish to have a wider influence are hampered by the barriers that exist between dialects of Zhuang. During my studies of Youjiang Zhuang with Wang Zhongji, I found that lyrics in his dialect were understandable, as were simple lyrics in nearby dialects. However, the further a dialect was from Tianyang, the more difficult the lyrics were to understand. This greatly limits the potential impact and profitability of a given artist can have.

Staged Performances

For Zhuang music, there are two kinds of staged performance: the first kind is performance that represents an aspect of Zhuang culture (I will refer to these as representative performances); the second kind is performance that is an abbreviated part of Zhuang culture. Representative performances typically occur at the county, prefecture, and autonomous region level. They take place on large stages in parks or other sizable venues during major holidays, television events, or at regular intervals for paying audiences. The logistics behind these events can be staggering, with needs for security, multiple camera angles, rehearsals, accommodations for performers and important guests, and other demands for the occasion. The musical pieces for these events are usually three to five minutes long and are either pop songs or short choral or instrumental compositions. The lyrics are tailored to the occasion and/or performance and are, for the most part, in Mandarin. Although many of the aspects of musical and performance structure have little to do with Zhuang culture, the performers dress in Zhuang costume, borrow melodies from song

tunes, and enact perceptions of what life for the Zhuang was like hundreds and even thousands of years ago. These representations often follow a structure that is reflected in the ICH lists, with larger performances portraying what has made national ICH lists, and local performances showing what parts of culture from their county are or should be considered prefectural or autonomous region ICH items. This promotion of officially recognized ICH items during larger performances is widespread. Among the Kam, even though their “big song” performances draw melodies from only four percent of the Kam population, it is the most widely promoted musical form, and is even used as a symbol of Kam identity (Ingram 2012:53).

Figure 6.4: A dancer mimicking playing the *tianqin* at a staged performance celebrating Sanyuesan in Nanning, Guangxi. Photo by author, 18 April 2018.



During my fieldwork, one of the more vivid examples of ICH promotion in representative performance was a large televised celebration of Sanyuesan in Guangxi’s capital, Nanning, that I attended in early 2018. The event itself was a celebration of the first song fair date to receive

Figure 6.5: The Anthropology Museum of Guangxi. Photo by author, 18 April 2018.



national ICH recognition. The first song for the evening performance was a well-known folksong from Napo County in Baise Prefecture, which was the first Zhuang folksong to make the national ICH list (Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan wang 2018). Throughout the performance there were other references to items on ICH lists such as the *tianqin* (天琴 *tiānqín*, see Figure 6.4),⁷⁶ and, of course, Liu Sanjie, a Zhuang ancestor from northern Guangxi renowned for her singing. Literature associated with her made China's first national ICH list. Other broad references to Zhuang culture were present as well. The evening performance was broadcast live from a stage constructed behind the Anthropology Museum of Guangxi, which is shaped like a large bronze drum (see Figure 6.5)—a frequent feature in decorations, architecture, and performances as a symbol of ancient Zhuang culture. The *maguhu* (a bowed spike lute with a horse-bone resonator), another Zhuang instrument, was featured in one of the songs as well.

Despite all of the efforts and ICH references that are put into these performances, the common song forms and themes often blend together, even across minority and provincial boundaries. The drum and dance numbers that represent ancient culture of the Zhuang in Guangxi are not that different from another well-known performance based on minority culture, “Charm Xiangxi” (*Meili Xiangxi*, 魅力湘西) in Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture

⁷⁶ The *tianqin* is a plucked spike lute that made Guangxi's first ICH list (Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu wenhua he luyou ting 2018). As with the *maguhu*, which is first mentioned in chapter one, I use the Mandarin Chinese pronunciation, since their Mandarin names are most common for these instruments in Guangxi, and because this is how the instruments would be referred to by the Youjiang Zhuang in my research area, who do not traditionally use these instruments. More information about both of these instruments can be found in Yang, Lu, He, and Ye's reference book on minority instruments in Guangxi (1989).

in Hunan Province, which I attended in summer 2018. The way that traditional song melodies are blended into pop or through-composed forms with instrumental accompaniment, and the ways that groups of male and female singers script their representations of song-based courtship, are very similar as well. These similarities across Guangxi and throughout China are products both of performance expectations and of the broad brush that is used to paint minority activities for mass consumption. They are created by concepts such as “stageworthiness,” a term used by Levi Gibbs to describe different aspects of composition, propriety in minority and national representation, and includes the expectation of accompaniment and background dancers (2018:108-111). Furthermore, these similarities are also grounded in “a shared performance

Figure 6.6: A singing contest in Xiangzhou Township, Tiandong in Baise Prefecture. Photo by author, 12 May 2018.



repertoire and dominant discourse on tourism prevalent in Guangxi and disseminated in performances and in media such as brochures, websites, and videos” that make up what Jessica Anderson Turner calls the “tourism commons” (2010:xiii).

In contrast to these representative staged performances are the abbreviated performances. While in my experience representative performances are most often undertaken by trained

professionals, the abbreviated performances are sung by traditional musicians. These performances often take place at annual song fairs at singing contests offering cash prizes, but can also occur at other times, such as a performance of *yuanshengtai shan'ge* I attended at the end of December 2018 in Tianyang.⁷⁷ Musically, they typically follow the same melodic process described in chapter three and don't include an accompaniment. The songs also use their local dialect of Zhuang. In larger performances and singing contests that include song tunes from multiple areas, this also means that multiple dialects of Zhuang will be sung. The logistics of these performances are much simpler than the representational staged performances. Most of the time, there is only a small sound system, two to four microphones, and a cut-out backdrop for the back of the stage. In the case of a singing contest, there is often a collapsible canopy set up for the judges, and for a significant contest, a canopy set up for the media (see Figure 6.6). The designation of these performances being an example of an "original ecology" performance is much more accurate than when the designation is applied to representational performance. For the 2018 performance I attended, every song was labeled as being an example of *yuanshengtai* singing.

However, these performances are still a bit removed from traditional expectations. I call these performances abbreviated because they are much shorter than the singing that takes place in more casual venues. Like the representational staged performances discussed above, these performances only last about five minutes for each group of male and female singers. The topics are almost always set, both to promote policies and local products, and to provide some kind of theme, or baseline for the judges in a singing contest. This can still prove interesting for the

⁷⁷ This particular performance was in support of themes drawn from China's 19th Congress (*Zhongguo gongchandang di shijiu ci quanguo daibiao dahui*) and was sponsored by a local housing development promoting end-of-the-year home purchases.

audience as they watch skilled singers attempt to address the given topic in a way that is connected to traditional literature and will garner a positive reaction from the crowd (such as laughter); however, the shortened nature of these performances creates a major gap between them and the way that singers normally perform. For example, in the December performance I attended in Tianyang, some of the songs would end with both men and women singing the last utterance of fien or singing multiple song tunes in one performance, choices that would likely not have occurred in the past. Additionally, the fact that the topics are set removes the freedom that singers normally have to transition between types of songs. These things are necessary for the consistency demanded by the stage, but they often wind up falling short of the standards set by the traditional literature and performance of fien.

Performing Fien in the Present

In terms of music, there are two significant differences distinguishing what I have designated as staged performances from performances that are closer to traditional Zhuang music. The first difference is in the musical forms that are used. This difference primarily occurs between traditional performances and representational performance. While staged performances include a wide variety of melodies, including “many songs that are not related to the singers’ home region” and “songs that have undergone ‘artistic processing’” (Ingram 2012:60), with fien, there is only one melodic frame. The second difference can be seen in the lyrics used in performances. This is an obvious difference when representational performances are considered, since the lyrics are usually in Mandarin and frequently describe the element of Zhuang culture that is being put on display. However, between traditional performance and abbreviated staged performance, the lyrical differences are in the amount and kinds of literature referenced, which is governed by the

time that each group of singers has to sing and the choices of event organizers. Traditional performances generally last as long as the singer wants. By contrast, staged performances often prescribe the topics that are going to be sung to the different groups of singers. This greatly limits the spectrum of lyrics that can be improvised and the kinds of traditional literature a singer can draw from. While I have used selections from these song contests in my analysis of fien, the samples used are compressed versions of two kinds of fien: riddle songs and songs of praise. That these kinds of fien are used for the two samples in this study drawn from singing contests is not surprising, since these contests are often used to create public awareness of local and national policy and to promote the economy of the local area. While other kinds of fien can occur in competitions and staged performances, these are also limited to a five-minute sample of a much larger song type. When this is combined with song tunes from other areas that may have lyrics incomprehensible to significant portions of the audience, there is a risk of even those who are interested in fien losing interest in the performance. Perhaps for these reasons, as I got up to leave at the end of the 2018 performance in Tianyang, a nearby spectator commented that it wasn't very lively.

Beyond these differences directly related to what has been analyzed up the present, there are other aspects of performance that distinguish fien from the staged performances and pop tunes mentioned above. The first, and most prominent contrast between traditional and staged singing of fien is the overall structure of traditional performance. While I mention differences between traditional and modern song types in the paragraph above, the way performances themselves take place traditionally would not be familiar to the modern concert attendee either. Outside staged performances, there are four general scenarios where singing fien might take place: first, at a traditional song fair; second, between men and women while traveling; third, when a group of

men would travel to village or place where there are women who can sing; and fourth, when singing by oneself. For solo performances, a singer will sing one strophe after the other on a wide range of topics, sometimes using material from her/his surrounding, and sometimes singing common song types. For the first three of these scenarios, when there are two groups of singers, the men are usually the initiators of the singing, starting with an introductory song type. The men will sing one or more strophes to the women to see if they would like to sing fien with them. The women will either refuse them or will join in singing antiphonal songs. After this point, for most of the singing, the men and women will switch each time a new strophe is sung, though one group might sing one or two extra strophes if the other group becomes stalled. The song types continue in a manner similar to what is discussed in chapter four: introductory types of singing will transition to song types related to affection, which will transition to song types about deeper commitment. Each song type has the potential to last anywhere from several minutes to a couple of hours. The songs will follow the general themes and will utilize the formulas of each type, but the details will vary depending on the circumstances of the singing and lyric improvisation abilities of the singers. The combination of these songs translate into a single performative act between singers that can last anywhere from one or two hours to singing that can last through the night. When multiple groups are present, which is normal at song fairs, it is not unusual to finish singing with one group and move on to another group, which will start the performance process all over again. One exception to this is that groups already familiar with each other might forgo introductory song types, moving instead to songs agreed to by both groups.

A second immediately noticeable disparity between singing in a more traditional context and the staged performances is the volume, which is low enough for traditional singing to go unnoticed if it is not being actively searched for. This is even true during song fairs, since the

singing of fien often occurs alongside commercial events such as an enlarged market day, or near staged performances. Unlike staged performances, which can be located from a long distance away because of their volume, most casual singers of fien do not use amplification for their singing. Additionally, from a distance, a large number of singers might sound closer to a group of people in conversation than people singing. Performances that occur during weekends at the park in Baise are also easy to miss, since the singers are often surrounded by street vendors, activities for children, and people out for walks. There are also other performers during the weekends, such as karaoke singers and small ensembles performing older popular songs and opera excerpts.

Another important difference is the location. Traditional song fair locations are known to the singers, but are usually wide, non-bordered areas such as a field, a mountainside, or an entire section of a town. These wide areas have places to sit such as rocks (or discarded bricks), the edges of rice fields (which are raised to contain water), or chairs placed outside houses. During weekend days that are warm enough and without rain, singers will come to a section of a local park, sing outside their homes, or listen to a recording of fien, sometimes with a friend present. For locations in fields, hillsides, and parks, the singers will usually take a piece of paper (e.g. an advertisement or newspaper) and set it down on top of these improvised seats to keep their clothes from getting dirty. There may be natural places for shade, such as a grove of trees or buildings, or the singers will bring umbrellas out with them.

A fourth difference is the way traditional performance is conducted. At a lively gathering, there are multiple groups of singers performing to each other simultaneously, creating a constant hum of singing. Talented or popular singers will be surrounded by a circle of onlookers and a few small MP3 recorders (Figure 6.7). In some cases, singers might be recorded by someone seeking to capture their performance on a video recorder and sell it later. Most of these performances are casual. Even singers performing for a camera will often come and go as they please. This does not necessarily mean that the singing will stop, since different singers might change places with each other as time passes. When I sang with Huang Wenke at the Ganzhuang Mountain song fair, he left for several minutes, and I continued singing with Liao Qizhong, who had been standing off to the side as an observer until Huang asked to switch with him. Because singing in these cases is casual, they are also somewhat dependent on the weather. Park performances will disband if it starts to rain; however, song fairs will often continue indoors or in other sheltered locations.

Figure 6.7: A more traditional singing performance at the Ganzhuang Mountain song fair. Photo by author, 23 April 2018.



While I separate the staged performances from “traditional performances” for the sake of highlighting differences, this does not mean that fien takes place in the same way that it always has either. As singers have gotten older, many have stopped singing and now prefer to listen to fien on VCDs or on card-reading devices that can play audio and video recordings. Videos are frequently recorded on special occasions, such as song fairs and weddings, combined with B-roll footage, and sold out of small stalls in and around market areas. These recordings usually feature two groups of two performers singing antiphonally to each other. As the popularity of fien has declined, there are only a few sellers of VCDs with traditional content. At the same time, though, a small number of WeChat groups for fien singers have formed, allowing singers to use their cell phones to sing back and forth. While these new methods of observing and participating in fien through electronic media have certainly affected the way fien is performed, an examination of these affects will be better served by a future study focusing on these updated media used to transmit fien.

Locations for singers have changed as well. The increase in Zhuang moving into Baise city has made it so that there are tunes from centers from all around the prefecture sung in People’s Park (人民公园 *rénmín gōngyuán*) and Forest Square (森林广场 *sēnlín guǎngchǎng*), in the center of the city. This location has served a kind of “natural hub that preserves and sustains the folk songs” (Werstler 2016), since it represents an area where singers can meet after moving away from areas where they grew up singing. Instead of Zhuang meeting each other while traveling or when there are visitors to their village (or when they visit a village), most now meet in the park when the weather is nice.

Another important shift in performances of fien is the way that they often occur alongside the other mode of performance mentioned in this chapter, especially at singing fairs. For example, at

the Ganzhuang Mountain song fair, singers gather beneath mango trees to sing to each other, staged singing competitions take place, and representative performances of Zhuang culture occur during the main ceremony. Even at singing fairs where there are large numbers of traditional singers, the other modes of performance can still be found. In the years following an article Qin Jindun and I published comparing the Ganzhuang Mountain song fair and another, more traditional singing fair at Guangyang in Tiandong County (2012), the smaller fair has since become more developed and includes a wider variety of music in its opening ceremony. This presence of different modes of performances occurring next to each other is a sort of exception to the staged and traditional categories that I use in this section, but it is not the only one. At some song fairs, special guest performers are invited to the singing fair who are able to sing whatever they want. Sometimes these performers will give an amplified performance that resembles that of a song competition. Other times, they might be allocated a designated area in which to sing. However, for fien, I have only seen this happen at smaller song fairs.

Although it can be tempting to valorize these traditional forms, and indeed it is my opinion that it is important to advocate for them, it is also important to acknowledge that all of the modes of performances mentioned have inherent advantages and disadvantages to them. Representative performances and pop songs, while being furthest removed from traditional Zhuang singing, attract the most attention from younger audiences and could be considered a form of recognizing and continuing Zhuang musical tradition “within the realm of modernity” (Ingram 2012:69). Also, while the forms that I have labeled “traditional” most closely resemble how Zhuang singing existed before the massive changes in culture during the last century, it is important to also recognize that many of these changes have benefited the Zhuang, especially over past thirty years. During my fieldwork, I was reminded of this in a conversation a friend of mine and I had

with one of the local Tianyang residents who helped me learn Youjiang Zhuang and its use in fien, Ling Yurong. During this visit, I was explaining to my friend how the Cultural Revolution had the greatest effect on urban cultures and decided to verify this with Ling Yurong. Although Ling acknowledged that traditional culture has been better preserved further away from the major roads, cities, and townships, she was also quick to point out that the economic benefits following the Open Door Policy were seen first in these larger and more accessible areas (2018b).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have observed three primary types of changes that have occurred in Zhuang music over the past century. The first is the replacement of traditional music by popular music and other Sino-Western forms of music that usually occur in staged performance. This replacement of musical forms has primarily occurred for the younger generations of Zhuang. The second has been the keeping of melodic and lyrical forms, but a change in the environment the songs take place in. This second change has resulted in the abbreviation of performances for use in song contests and staged performances, or has meant meeting up with friends in local parks for more casual singing opportunities. The third change has been in the age of the singers. Each year, the age of traditional performers keeps increasing, with very few younger Zhuang following in their footsteps. The change in age also means that the number of singers who have used these songs to find a life partner is very small, since even older singers came of age just before the Cultural Revolution.

One of the most important aspects of these changes regarding my hypothesis is the fact that younger Zhuang, even those who are fluent, have difficulty understanding fien lyrics. In my

experiences with Su Xiaoyong, Wang Zhongji, and others, I have found that popular music forms and kuaiban are very easy to understand, while fien either requires multiple listens or an explanation from a singer to know what is being sung. This is not only due to the vocables, changes to speech tones, and vocabulary that is no longer used, but also because the uses of words are not always what is expected. For example, asking for a towel or a mirror and comb from someone in song, which is a part of *fien aeu gaen* (songs of taking a handkerchief), is not something that is done in contemporary music or conversation. Furthermore, the melody is also perceived differently by younger Zhuang than by those who sing fien. While singers see the melody and lyrics as essential to each other, younger Zhuang see the melody as something that is repetitious and boring. It is for this reason that Zhuang-language popular music is often recommended as a way to preserve Zhuang culture through music (see Qin Jindun 2010 and Xu Xiaoming 2012). From this major shift in musical culture over the last few decades, it is evident that the musical worlds of traditional singers and of modern Zhuang are very different both in terms of literature and melodic expectation. This further supports the notion that the single melodic frame of fien marks a world that is distinct from everyday speech in Zhuang, and even from what we normally call “music” in English.

The second question concerning the use of my hypothesis of structure and meaning in fien for bringing clarity to the current situation facing this musical tradition, especially regarding cultural revitalization, is more difficult to answer. Since my hypothesis still needs to be tested, I am hesitant to say that it is necessary for better understanding and revitalization of traditional Zhuang singing. Even if my hypothesis were to be considered sound after further testing, it still represents a Western approach to Zhuang singing. However, there are two related aspects of my research that indicate additions to existing efforts that could be beneficial both for future research

and for continuing revitalization efforts for singing and language learning. The first is the importance of analyzing and/or teaching the tune and the lyrics together. Since singers value both the lyrics and the way they are sung, and since there are patterns in the variations and commonalities in the fien melody that likely relate to lyrics, including singing in collections of lyrics, and having longer recordings of song for music collections with lyrics included, should be more common. This would help both researchers and those who wish to learn how to do fien in the future. The second recommendation based on this project is the use of the song tune for language revitalization projects. Since there are younger Zhuang who have difficulty with their native language, introducing the songs, not only for the musical aspect, but also for their literary and linguistic content, could be a valuable way of revitalizing both Zhuang language and Zhuang music. As Catherine Grant asserts, “united cross-disciplinary advocacy efforts are arguably more likely to be successful in the medium term than are isolated intra-disciplinary ones” (2018:241).

As I mention above, both of these recommendations have precedents in pre-existing projects. For example, in one of my early interviews with Zhuang singers, Huang Mingya mentioned teaching fien at one of the local schools (Huang, Pan, and Qin 2018), an activity that is part of an initiative by the Tianyang government to protect fien for future generations.⁷⁸ While this effort has not become widespread due to the small number of schools where younger Zhuang students can understand their language well enough to sing, it is still an encouraging direction. Also, during spring semester of 2018, some of the students in the music department of Baise University performed a concert in which they presented folksongs they had learned from traditional singers in the areas around Baise. Increased research on how the music and lyrics

⁷⁸ Cultural revitalization efforts in schools have also taken place in other areas of Guangxi, such as Pingguo County, and among other ethnicities in China such as the Naxi (Rees 2012), the Kam (Ingram 2012), and the Han Chinese (Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck 2007).

combine in fien could help bolster the effectiveness of these efforts through providing additional resources for building courses at all educational levels and providing additional methods for revitalizing the Youjiang dialect of Zhuang.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to test a hypothesis concerning a syntactic and semantic relationship between music and language in the fien of the Youjiang Zhuang in western Guangxi. The hypothesis is that the melody of fien has a syntactic relationship with the lyrics at the level of complete clauses and that this structural relationship is related to the melody having the semantic meaning of a possible world of Zhuang oral literature. The goals driving this study have been both to further understand traditional forms of music making where single-tune melodies are dominant and to use these song-forms as a lens to re-examine the relationship between music and language. While the findings of my research have supported the conjectures of structure and meaning in fien that are proposed in the original hypothesis, there is still a good deal of work to be done. The amount of data analyzed represents only a fraction of fien singing among the Youjiang Zhuang. Further examination of recordings already collected, future opportunities to record and sing fien, and additional conversations and interviews could overturn, modify, or verify my hypothesis. Furthermore, the different theoretical perspectives and additional data used in conjunction with fien both need to be further developed in the future. For example, both the grammatical features I discuss in chapter three and the forms of literature I use for comparison in chapter four could each be the subjects of their own dissertation. Also, since the primary focus of this dissertation has been to establish a syntactic and semantic interpretation of fien, more work still needs to be done in modeling and theorizing the structures of fien and the significance of those structures. At the same time, the verification of the major elements of this hypothesis has helped provide direction regarding how to expand this research in the future and how it might be able to be applied to other studies. In this chapter, I will provide a brief review

of the findings of this dissertation, what their potential relevance is, and how they can be expanded in the future.

Fien in Global and Local Contexts

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I analyze four major characteristics of fien—a tight rhythmic and melodic frame, a priority of lyrics over melody, geographic tune association, and use in annual singing events to find life partners—and demonstrate that genres with these characteristics are widespread throughout China and other areas of Southeast Asia. The primary groups focused on are the Kam (Dong) in Guizhou Province, speakers of the Wu dialect in southern Jiangsu Province, singers of hua'er in northwest China, the Tai Dam in northern Vietnam, and the Kammu in northern Laos. I use these examples both because of their similar characteristics and because of their geographic distance from each other.

From the widespread nature of similar genres, I move to flesh out the geographic and musical environment of fien. The ways scholars of Zhuang music discuss melody, literature, geography, and singing fairs lays a foundation for this discussion, especially through showing the varying degrees of specificity that exist in different monographs and reference materials. This helps explain how fien can be discussed in both a broad and narrow sense geographically, which allows for a more nuanced discussion of the song tunes that are dominant in the area where the Youjiang dialect is said to be spoken. Once I narrow the tune-area to northern Tianyang and Tiandong Counties, I discuss the other traditional genres that have existed alongside fien.

The research that I conducted for this dissertation adds to a growing body of literature on strophic singing both in Asia and in other places around the globe. There are more ethnicities in China and Southeast Asia that have all four of the characteristics mentioned above than the

examples given. For example, of the thirty-three ethnicities included in Yang Mu's survey of erotic music activities (EMA) in China, all but six groups have festivals or gatherings related to these practices, and all of the groups surveyed associate some kind of singing with EMA (1998). The number of minorities singing genres similar to fien would be even larger if a small amount of leeway were allowed in the definitions of the four characteristics given. For example, Gloria Wong's study of the Hani minority in southeast Yunnan includes all of these characteristics, with the exception of the romantic singing occurring primarily in private settings and not in annual festivals (2009). If we were to primarily focus on the melodic frame as a point of similarity, then there are several different places around the globe with similar ways of music making. In addition to the epic singing described by Albert Lord, similar song forms can be found among different groups of Native Americans (Levine and Nettl 2011) and among the Aka in Central Africa (Fürniss 2006). As this body of literature grows, my work can provide an additional way to examine these kinds of music as well as continuing to verify the usefulness of existing approaches such as those pioneered by Lord, Schimmelpenninck, and Tenzer.

One of the ways my research could be expanded in a way that would further contribute to understanding strophic singing is through deeper comparisons of the singing in nearby Zhuang tune areas. There are over one hundred different strophic song tunes that exist among the Zhuang in Guangxi and southeast Yunnan. While scholars examining different aspects of Zhuang song tradition such as Zhou Guowen (2005), Bai Xue (2015), Lu Xiaoqin (2016), and Ping Feng (2017) have done excellent work, there are still a number of tunes and traditions associated with them that have not been studied in detail. Although there are a few tunes that have been mapped in detail in academic publications (such as those just mentioned), there are still many song tunes that have not been a part of a detailed published survey, especially down to the level of

individual villages. Also, there is still a need for greater inclusion of lyrical content in studies of musical form and greater inclusion of melody in collections of lyrics. Correlating more detailed mapping of tunes with literature use and types of song fairs would create an excellent resource for better understanding who the Zhuang are and how different groups of Zhuang relate to each other. These kinds of interdisciplinary efforts would certainly help with future work among the Youjiang Zhuang. More research needs to be done concerning the extent of the dangzvuengz songs, Daoist rituals, shamaness songs, and other miscellaneous tunes that have inhabited this area. Since these forms of music also feature strophic forms similar to fien, a full exploration of the different monothematic genres, their literature, and the social contexts they exist in is critical for a deeper understanding of the traditional culture of the Youjiang Zhuang.

Syntactic Structure of Fien

The first part of the hypothesis of this dissertation focuses on the potential of a syntactic relationship between sections of the fien melody and complete clauses of the Youjiang Zhuang language. For defining what a complete clause is, I turn to the concept of argument structure commonly used in syntax, where a complete clause is one where the required argument positions of a given verb are filled. Argument positions can take different parts of speech, which can change depending on what language is being discussed. For the Zhuang, some argument positions that would take a prepositional phrase in English take another verb phrase instead in what is known as a serial verb construction. Other structures important to determining complete clauses are null copular constructions (a complete clause that omits a being verb) and the way that classifiers and determiners serve as the boundaries of determiner phrases, which often fill

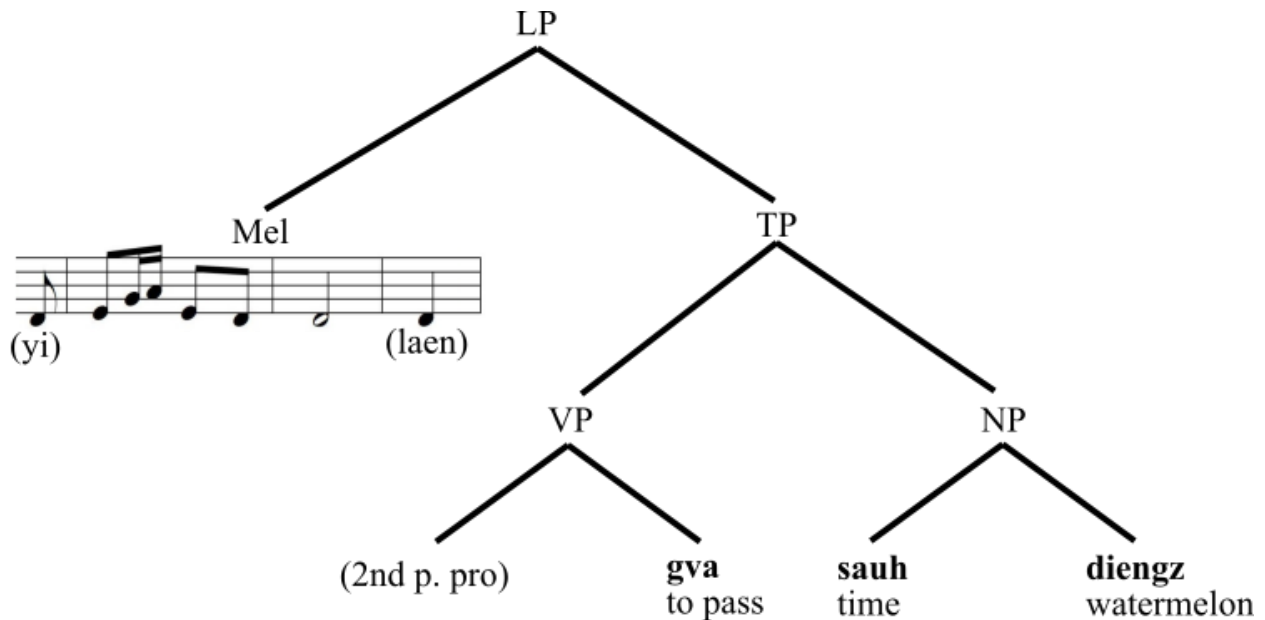
argument positions. For the song tune, I start by analyzing the units of melody that combine with individual words and expand to units of melody that take lines of text.

At smallest level, melodic units corresponding with a single pulse join with words and ornamental vocables. Melody at this level has the greatest amount of variation in the overall tune-frame, in part because ornamental vocables and ornamental sections of melodic units may or may not be included. Other vocable-note combinations mark points of stability in the melody of Tianzhou fien at the beginning, middle, and end of each iteration. In iterations of the melody that take a single line of text, the beginning and end of the melodic frame serve as points to evaluate whether or not the line contains a complete clause. For iterations of the melody containing two lines of text, the first line is bounded by the beginning and middle of the melody, and the second line is bounded by the middle and end of the melody. Each strophe is made up of multiple lines of text and multiple iterations of melody. The final iteration of each utterance of fien finishes on a distinct note-vocable combination marking the end of the strophe.

To test this first part of the hypothesis, I examine three hundred fifty iterations of fien from forty completed sung utterances of fien. In these iterations, there are five hundred lines of text. Of these five hundred lines, all but six meet the criteria of being complete clauses. Of these six remaining phrases, three need to be followed by complete clauses to be complete; one reduplicates a verb in the following line, which preserves the verb-object relationship; and two could be considered either rare exceptions, or even potential null-copular constructions. While there are serial verb constructions that take place over multiple lines and iterations, they are arranged in such a way that lines share subjects with or are the subject for subsequent lines. However, these larger structures, though corresponding with sections of the melody at the level of a clause, do not necessarily line up neatly with groups of iterations. Instead, all units larger

than a sentence find their completeness at the level of the strophe, which is usually bounded by stock phrases with narrower melodic and rhythmic constraints than the other iterations.

Figure 7.1: A visual representation of the syntactic relationship between the melody and lyrics of *fien* at the level of a complete clause. While there are other ways this relationship could be expressed because the melody occurs parallel to the text, I choose this method of representation to illustrate the separate melodic and linguistic constituents.



In the evaluation of the syntactic portion of my hypothesis, my findings are consistent with Albert Lord’s assertion that “very rarely indeed does a thought land in the air incomplete at the end of the line; usually we could place a period after each verse” (1960:54). What my study adds to the work of Lord is a specific melodic frame that has a clear constituency of its own. The sections of the melody that take complete clauses can exchange these sentences with any number of other complete clauses without losing their sense of structure or identity as Tianzhou *fien*. I propose a visual expression of this arrangement in Figure 7.1, where LP (lyric phrase) is a phrase resulting from the merger of text and tune, Mel is a unit of melody of *fien* corresponding to a line of text and TP is a complete clause. In this case, the TP consists of a verb phrase (VP) and a noun phrase (NP). While fluctuations in the melody do take place with different sets of lyrics, it

is important to recognize that these smaller changes do not go beyond the frame of the Tianzhou tune. This constituency of a tonal unit that can combine with linguistic unit(s) at determinate locations provides a much stronger unit for syntactic analysis than attempts at finding parallels between music and smaller units of language (e.g. between nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc.).

At the same time, this observation of a genre of music with a structural correspondence between a unit of melody and a unit of language does not put it at odds with previous studies of analyzing music through the lens of generative syntax. This is because previous studies, such as the Generative Theory of Tonal Music (Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1986), have primarily focused on explaining the structure of music using note-to-note progressions as a foundation. Moreover, Lerdahl asserts in a more recent essay that GTTM's analysis, which has a similar set of operations "from the smallest detail up to a large movement such as sonata form" is "too uniform and needs to be supplemented by methods that incorporate aspects of discourse structure" 2010:269. While I stop short of delineating a specific structure of discourse for fien, the analysis of musical iterations that join with sentence-level constituencies, that then join to form a strophe, is a good first step in this direction. Indeed, it is also a parallel observation to Kofi Agawu's analysis of Western classical music, where he states that "musical discourse embraces the larger hierarchical level that encompasses these sentences. Musicians typically speak of 'periodicity,' the sense of a period being determined by the nature and weight of the punctuation at its end. A succession of periods constitutes the form of a composition" (2009:7). While Zhuang music is quite different from Western classical music, finding a certain degree of commonality in units of organization that parallel language is another positive indication that this may be a good direction to continue in for future research.

While my finding of consistent sections of the fien melody that correspond with complete clauses does confirm the first part of my hypothesis, there are several ways to continue testing this hypothesis and even to improve it. The first way to improve this study is to increase the amount of material examined. Although a significant number of lines and iterations were examined during the testing of this hypothesis, they only represent transcriptions of 1.5 hours of the approximately 30 hours of recordings collected. Continuing to accurately transcribe lyrics and melody from recordings already referenced and from additional sources not included in the analysis will be a critical initial step for expanding this study. The second way this study can be improved is by generating examples of errors. Being able to demonstrate conclusively that clauses being broken apart by iterations of fien is ungrammatical or, conversely, finding that such breaks do not matter, would provide a very significant data point. A third way to improve this portion of the study would be to conduct more thorough fieldwork on the Youjiang Zhuang language, including additional tests of spoken argument structures and the phrases that fill those argument positions and wider surveys to verify how common different phrase structures are. Finally, since each strophe contains multiple complete clauses, it may be beneficial to re-examine the melody of fien in relationship with discourse instead of just clauses.

Meaning in the Melody of Fien

Syntactic categories are more than structural arrangements; they also represent categories of meaning. For this reason, it is important for a hypothesis of musical structure to include a function or reason for that structure. In the fourth chapter, I test the second part of my hypothesis, that the fien melody represents a possible world of Zhuang oral literature. This conjecture is based both on the way the structure of melody interacts with the lyrics and the

value of lyrics in Zhuang music. To test this part of my hypothesis, I turn to David Lewis' work on truth in fiction. The concept of truth in fiction is important because it accounts both for structure, since statements regarding a possible literary world are made relative to that literary world, and for meaning, since the world referenced is distinct from what we usually call the "real" world. For Lewis, truth in fiction is the product of "the explicit content of the fiction, and a background consisting either of the facts about our world or of the beliefs overt in the community of origin" (1978:45). An examination of fien under these terms then is to see if an explicit content and cultural background exist.

To examine fien for a kind of "explicit content," I expand the material referenced in this dissertation to include written collections of fien lyrics and categories of fien given to me in interviews. Although fien is closer in form to sung conversations and statements than story telling genres, the common features shared in these collections show that there is still a central body of lyrics that make up a kind of literature of fien. There is an identifiable set of song types that are used in similar ways, especially for groups of men and women singing to each other and for important life events. These lyric categories have their own identifiable themes and formulas, which are sometimes shared between categories of fien. This contributes to many sets of lyrics, even those that are claimed to be original, being very similar to each other, and to expectations regarding how lyrics will be responded to in dialogue songs.

For the background beliefs that are a part of fien, I examine similarities and differences associated with the literature of two other genres of Zhuang music, and how exchanging lyrics between fien and these genres is viewed by singers. The different lyrical centers of kuaiban and the dangzvuengz stories show that there is a sense of certain groups of lyrics belonging to these different musical styles. This does not mean that there might not be similar lyrics or even sharing

music between genres, but that the lyrical centers have enough separation to be clearly distinct from each other. Fien lyrics are centered around love songs and traditional life events (marriage, childbirth, etc.), kuaiban is focused on political themes and the resolution of arguments, and the dangzvuengz stories represents a sung collection of written literature told in the third person. While there are mixed feelings about whether or not kuaiban lyrics or dangzvuengz lyrics can be sung in the fien melody, this can be explained by a given singer's experience with fien, ideals of lyric construction ability, and that the source of the lyrics would still be recognized as being outside fien. These explanations also help explain why when singers state that "anything" can be sung in fien, there is likely still a sense of convention associated with fien dictating what can be included and how.

The correlation of a body of literature with the melody of fien is a critical part of resolving one of the problems that has plagued the use of linguistic models in ethnomusicology since attempts to implement them in the 1950s and 1960s. This problem, as expressed by Steven Feld, is "that of whether the proposed models adequately capture the facts of ethnomusicological phenomena at all; here I refer to the curious fact that, thus far, the models focus only on music" (1974:206). While this proposal of fien as a possible world of oral literature does not provide the entire spectrum of cultural activities associated with the Tianzhou tune, it does provide a framework that gives meaning to the structures that make up a performance. Furthermore, the framework of worlds can be expanded in multiple ways. Structurally, music does not only have correlations with language, but can also have relationships with images, movement, events, and combinations of these entities. In a similar manner, complex melodic constructions of instrumental performance in some cultures could be explained as a result of music merging with itself. One example of a combination of music with both musical and visual bodies of literature

can be seen Ilario Meandri Sanchez's work on film music formulas. In a recent article, Sanchez details how certain musical formulas combine with types of movie scenes typical to those formulas. While some of this is imposed on composers, even those who transcend prevailing conventions do so "precisely because a complete mastery of the formulaic allows these great artists to strike a difficult balance between stylistic recognizability and respect for the conventions in force, a synergy between traditional and innovation" (2014:36).

As with the discussion concerning the syntax of fien, there is a need for further data collection to further verify or challenge this part of my hypothesis. This includes more complete written collections, lists of fien, and wider surveys of what can and can't be included in fien. Central to these efforts is my own ability to speak Zhuang and to perform fien, dangzvuengz and kuaiban. Increased fluency to allow a higher degree of nuanced conversation with traditional performers and understanding of song lyrics would greatly increase my understanding of the content and workings of these bodies of literature. One way to work toward this is through completing both a musical and a lyrical transcription of a singer's written collection, such as the one given to me by Huang Wenke (2018a). This would be an excellent step in this direction, since it would give me a better performable baseline for comparison with other collections of fien. At the very least, the categories of fien in Huang's collection can be compared with individual or small groups of categories that are present on VCDs.

Living with and in Fien

In examining the concept of the melody of fien representing a possible world, it is important to go beyond an examination of the lyrical content of fien to examining how fien is experienced and discussed. This aspect of a world takes us beyond the logical-semantic discussion of David

Lewis and into the field of hermeneutics. These two ways of addressing worlds can be illustrated using the analogy of a scaffold. Chapter four, with its focus on examining if the fien melody references a body of oral literature, is like focusing on the structure of the scaffold, since the primary questions concern a direct explanation of syntactic correlation. On the other hand, hermeneutics attempts to figure out what the structure is for from the perspective of one who already inhabits and uses the structure. In chapter five, I explore the potential of fien to function as a world in terms of a familiar surrounding environment that can take someone from their everyday world and refigure their reality upon their return. To investigate this potential aspect of fien, I turn to the vocabulary to discuss fien, the lives of people who have experienced fien, and my own experience of learning to sing fien.

The ways that the Youjiang Zhuang talk about fien reiterate that fien is a genre separate from other traditional forms that would be considered musical and emphasize the importance of lyrics in fien. The unique position of fien in Youjiang Zhuang culture can be seen in the verb-object pairs it takes with verbs for doing (gueg), singing (ciengq), improvising (doq), and speaking (dog) fien. The privileged position of lyrics in fien is illustrated by words for structural divisions in fien that share their meaning and use with spoken language. Additionally, the fixed nature of the melody is emphasized by its simple categorization as humanly-produced sound (hieng) and the use of general adjectives to describe the timbre of a known melody. Vocabulary used to describe notes, scales, or tonal composition does not exist in Youjiang Zhuang. This is not to say that melody is unimportant to the Zhuang, just that it is limited to a few tonal frames and not a part of a compositional process. When the Zhuang talk about what good fien is, they also include this melodic frame in their discussions.

In conversations with Zhuang singers and my own attempts at learning to sing, it is evident that both the melody and the lyrics are critical to singing well. It is not enough to be able to come up with or recite sets of lyrics, nor is it enough to have a good singing voice or to sing the melody correctly. A clear singing voice, witty and rhymed lyrics, and the ability to reference and sing a body of oral literature are essential aspects of being a good singer. This last point is especially important, because of the acknowledgement that just being able to sing one strophe of fien well is still not enough. Singing one strophe of fien well, with the appropriate use of the melodic frame and lyrics, is enough to create expectation, but if it is not supported by being able to sing more of the literature, it is not considered to be good singing.

When singing fien is done well, it is responded to with laughter. From my conversations with Huang Wenke and Qin Jindun, singing fien well is able to change the state of the hearts and minds of the singers and listeners, alleviating boredom, and causing them to lose track of time. To some singers, this experience is worth traveling hours by bus or by foot for, dressing up for, and skipping school for. While, in the past, this was also coupled with the possibility of finding a life partner, even then it did not have to end that way. Doing fien could be enjoyed for its own experience.

My interviews and conversations with singers of fien, along with my own experience of learning to sing fien, has produced some indications of the melody of fien having some qualities of a world. However, these indications need to be further explored through additional time with singers and with more time spent singing. While the Zhuang do not discuss their music using the lens of hermeneutics, asking a larger number of singers about their perception of time while singing, about different ways to sing the melody, and about the relationship between the words and music from their own perspective would be helpful in this area. However, I suspect that even

more critical to understanding how the Zhuang live in and with fien will be more casual time spent with singers and more performances with them. Since many of the singers still work in agricultural occupations, seeking opportunities to work with them would also help with these conversations as well as better understanding the interplay between fien and everyday living.

Fien in the Present

The final part of this study of fien concerns how it has made its way into the present, how it relates to more contemporary forms of music making that have their roots in Western musical genres, and current efforts being made to revive interest in fien. Fien has experienced a sharp decline in use and popularity since the 1950s and is in danger of disappearing in the next generation or two. This statement may sound reminiscent of the alarm bells that have sounded throughout the development of ethnomusicology of cultural greyout at the hands of Western popular music. However, in my own study of Zhuang music, which began over eight years ago in 2010, I have still not met anyone below the age of twenty who sings fien. While this sixth chapter is not as focused on different theories of language and the world as the previous chapters, it is still written with the intention of providing additional information useful to those discussions. Additionally, raising the issue of the sharp decline of fien and efforts to revive this traditional musical form provides an opportunity to question what the potential practical application of my hypothesis is to this issue.

The primary reasons for the sharp decline of fien have to do with the impact of the Cultural Revolution being followed almost immediately by increased exposure to globalized culture, the accelerating trend in the last two decades toward education of Zhuang children outside their hometowns, and the recent exodus of young Zhuang from Guangxi to other provinces in search

of better jobs. All of these factors have been accelerated by rapid buildup of infrastructure in Guangxi beginning in the 1950s. The negative attitudes toward traditional culture among educators and policy makers during much of the 1980s and 1990s meant that the rapid decline of fien continued unchecked. The result is that younger Zhuang now listen to music where the creation of new melodies takes precedence over the lyrics and literature, which are more prominent in fien. Most now see traditional singing as boring and prefer to listen to popular songs with lyrics in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English.

China's international engagement in the intangible cultural heritage movement, the merger of economic and cultural interests, and increased sensitivity toward loss of natural and cultural ecosystems has resulted in changed attitudes toward fien on the official level. However, it still remains to be seen whether the efforts at recognizing Tianzhou fien and different song fairs where fien takes place as an ICH item will arrest its continued retreat from Zhuang culture as traditional singers get older. Modernized staged performances are completely different from fien, and staged performances of fien, like my own singing attempts, do not make full use of the lyrics that are available in the oral literature of fien. On the other hand, the practice of singing fien is still kept alive by the older Zhuang, who sing in the parks and still participate in singing fairs. Additionally, some locations further removed from city centers have some singers who are in their thirties, and efforts to teach fien in the schools may help some of the younger generation discover an interest in fien.

Observing the experiences of fien in the present helps strengthen my hypothesis that fien is a possible world of oral literature that is distinct from daily life and other genres of music. The inability of younger Zhuang to comprehend lyrics, not only due to pronunciation in song and the use of older lyrics, but also due to metaphors unique to fien, is one indicator of this distinction.

Likewise, the attitudes of younger Zhuang toward the repetitive traditional melodic frame, which is valued by traditional singers, demonstrates a difference between the generations in understanding of what qualities are desirable in music.

Most of the issues highlighted in this discussion of the present state of Zhuang music are common to the music and traditions of other ethnicities in China. The events of the last century that suppressed traditional ways of doing music and introduced completely new cultural forms are an important area of study both for those interested in Chinese studies and for those interested in cultural change. My research adds to the growing number of voices advocating for cultural revitalization that is sensitive to the present circumstances and new genres of music of China's minorities. It is difficult to say, though, if the Zhuang will ever see a successful revival of folk singing. Even with the current efforts, the youngest Zhuang I have met who can sing are now (as of 2019) in and around their thirties. I have met one person, Qin Pei, who began learning fien from his grandmother as part of his studies in the Folk Arts Department at Guangxi Arts Institute in 2012. However, even in my interview with him and two other singers, Qin Pei acknowledged that no one else his age sings (Huang, Pan, and Qin 2017). Like the big song genre of the Kam, since fien "depends on oral transmission, its future will depend especially upon the 'village tradition' transmission and content remaining distinctly different from that presented on stage, and at the same time continuing to be valued by new generations of Kam villagers" (Ingram 2012:70). However, with the number of recorded examples, existing singers, and the current efforts already existing in schools, it may be possible to create a bridge between the nationalized education virtually all Zhuang are receiving and their local oral tradition. The compilation of materials in support of this dissertation and the acknowledgement of the mutual importance of lyrics and melody in fien could potentially help in the creation of this bridge and

to help “promote the need for consolidated response” among both researchers and others who might be interested in assisting in the revitalization of fien (Grant 2014:171).

There are three major ways that my work on fien could be expanded in relation to its present circumstances. First, in addition to expanding knowledge of how the concept *yuanshengtai* (original ecology) and other terms related to environmental conservation are used in reference to Zhuang singing, a more detailed study of China’s culture industry would be helpful for future research not only on Zhuang traditions, but also on other traditional music forms. While there is a significant amount of engagement with the issue of tourism and culture in Western academic circles, terms such as “culture industry” (文化产业 *wénhuà chǎnyè*), “culture product” (文化产品 *wénhuà chǎnpǐn*), and “culture brand” (文化品牌 *wénhuà pǐnpái*), and how these terms are used in the Chinese context, have received very little attention. A second area of expansion would be an exploration of how different staged content and popular music representing Zhuang music gets produced from the perspective of the people who compose the content and put it on the stage. While I have been exposed to some of the production practices, I have not spent much time with the performers and producers of this kind of music. A third area of expansion would be to continue following the development of traditional forms such as fien, to continue monitoring efforts at reviving traditional practice, and to conduct a longitudinal study of how these practices are treated in education and policy making. It is still possible that the efforts discussed in this dissertation, of visiting schools, arranging fien performances, and supporting competitions at song fairs will help garner some interest among younger Youjiang Zhuang.

Conclusion

What does a melody mean when it is repeated over and over again for hours on end, but is neither part of a ritual nor a chant? What does a melody mean when it is used for different kinds of social occasions without any significant change? What does a melody mean when a new song is reflected by a change in lyrics, and not in the variation of scales, modes, or themes? In the case of fien, I hold to my hypothesis that the relationship between the melody and lyrics in fien is one between a possible world of Zhuang oral literature and the contents of that world. From the research I have conducted up to the present, this is evident in the way the song tune meets with the lyrics, the way the melody is associated with a recognized body of oral literature, and the way that those who sing and listen to fien are impacted by interactions with fien. While there is still a good deal of research to do, for the sake of continuing to explore my hypothesis, I am comfortable saying that further examination of Zhuang melody may help us move beyond music as “humanly organized sound” (Blacking 1973) to “sounded possible worlds.”

In closing this dissertation, there are two major questions I would like to address. The first concerns the potential benefit of this hypothesis to ethnomusicology and to studies of music and language. The topic of relationships between music and language is full of proposals that are no longer in use. As Bruno Nettl cautions, “the similarities between music and language are important, but the two differ in essence and at many levels. The players of the game have had to bend the system, and perhaps they did not bend it enough to provide musically useful results” (2005:311). What potential, then, does syntactic correlation between music and language at the level of sentences in at least a few genres of strophic singing have to the entirety of music? Does this or the proposed meaning of possible worlds add anything of value to the activity of examining music?

The relevance of syntactic correlation between music and complete clauses lies in the proposal that consistent syntactic equivalents may exist for music, but at a higher level of organization than previously theorized. Under this proposal, the next lower level of organization, rather than being analogous to the syntax of lexical items and smaller phrases, is more closely related to phonology, as posited by GTTM (Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1986). This is not to say that this kind of musical constituent (what we would likely call a musical phrase) is a sentence; rather, it is to postulate that the sentence is the unit of language that the smallest complete and meaningful constituent of music is most likely to merge with. It is also to conjecture that the structural behavior between musical phrases is closer to what occurs between sentences than between smaller constituents. Furthermore, focusing on relationships between larger structures may also be the best way to account for how music merges with other kinds of hierarchical structures, and not just with language. Combining music with complex action (Jackendoff 2009), for example, could further uncover how we determine melodic constituents, what other constituents can merge with music, and what kinds of structures these mergers form. This would not only provide additional means to test how the mind processes musical structures, but would also provide additional data for comparison between these mental processes and those involved with language.

That music can be some kind of possible world accounts for a number of different problems that music presents to theories of meaning. Music as a possible world provides an explanation for music's non-referential characteristics by acknowledging that the problem of speaking conclusively about the work (Seeger's linguocentric predicament) is shared with our speech about the world around us. As Charles Seeger asserts, "[language's] strengths and weaknesses are as operative in musicology as everywhere else" (1977a:188). Music as a possible world is a

broad enough category to encompass the joining of music with other kinds of worlds (such as literature, images, movement) to make larger performance-worlds. Judith Becker makes a similar observation concerning trance, when she states that “the music, the trancing, and every other aspect of the ritual process bring forth the activities of each other, bring forth a world, a reality in which certain actions are expected and appropriate” (2004:129). Finally, while my initial attraction to possible worlds was for a semantic explanation of structure, moving discussions of structure and meaning in music to worlds acknowledges that “musical expression refers to a meaning beyond that of the syntactical organization internal to a work” (Savage 2010a:96).

My second and final question is a move beyond my paper to ask what the Zhuang I have interacted with would likely think of this dissertation. From the time I have spent in Guangxi, it seems that the potential practical results that could come out of this study are more important to the Zhuang than the content of the dissertation itself. If it can be used to increase interest in fien, to increase the profitability of knowing how to do fien, or to help a significant number of people learn fien, the dissertation could be seen as useful. I have seen indications of these attitudes in the VCDs that have been sold of me attempting to follow along with other singers. I have experienced it in the random Zhuang at the highspeed rail station who have asked me if I am the foreigner who was singing fien on WeChat. I have come to believe this through Huang Wenke’s urging me to learn fien from the book he sold me in the hope that we could sing at the Ganzhuang Mountain song fair together again, and that one day I might even be able to sing by myself. My learning of fien has always been of more interest to the Zhuang than my writing about it. My hypothesis concerning the relationship between music and language in fien and the theories of syntax, semantics, and being will likely not generate very much interest, at least not outside the Zhuang who work in academic circles. This is not to denigrate either the theories or

the Zhuang for not having an interest in them; rather, it is to acknowledge that they already know the structure and significance of their music to themselves. This is something I will probably never grasp in its entirety. Indeed, Qin Jindun has been careful to remind me that, even with my dissertation on fien and the media attention for my attempts at singing, I am still very new to this way of doing music.

Figure 7.2: Huang Wenke and me singing with another group of singers at the Ganzhuang Mountain song fair. Frame from video taken by Bingxin Chen, 22 April 2018.



APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF SONGS ANALYZED FOR CHAPTER 3

The following is a collection of song transcriptions from the performances of six different groups of singers that occurred on at least four different occasions.⁷⁹ Consisting of just under 350 lines of text, these performances make up the majority of the singing analyzed for this dissertation. They demonstrate the degree of variation that can be present in the length of iterations and strophes and contain much of the specific content that is discussed in the chapters above. The transcriptions of strophes are arranged by iteration, while the lyrics written below each transcription are arranged by lines of lyrics. This means that some iterations contain two lines of text. In my translations, I mark what would be understood through context with parenthesis and mark lyrics with unclear meaning with brackets and those with unknown meanings with brackets and a question mark. I mark words where the meaning is known, but the tones are uncertain with a question mark. Finally, because the translations are idiomatic, there are some lines where the meaning is accounted for in the original Zhuang, but it is worded differently in English to aid understanding.

⁷⁹ Some of the songs in Huang Wenke and Huang Miaofan's collections were likely recorded on different occasions.

Huang Wenke (2018) Fien Ciaz (Songs of Introduction)

Men Strophe 1

mbaeuq (ah) gueg (ah) angq - (lw-) laemx (ah) haep (ah-) langh (ah) laj - giuz (laen)

miah (ah) nix (ah) mbaeuq (lw - de) angq (ah) liu (laen)

ciuh hunz dang miuh haeux (ah - lw-) miuh (ah) haeux (ah) ndaex - gwn (ah) daeuj_ (ah) ndaex - gai (na)

ciuh (ah) hunz (ah) zaeuh (ah) gi - j lai (laen)

maih (ah) mbaeuq (ah) dai (ah) goj (ah) gei - (gah laix ah lae ae)

(ngoenz nix) mbaeuq gueg angq⁸⁰ Today (you) aren't happy
day this Neg to do happy

laemx haplangh laj giuz The waves move underneath the bridge
water waves under bridge

miah nix mbaeuq angq liu Now (you) are not smiling
time this Neg happy smile

ciuh hunz dang miuh haeux The life of a person is a meal of rice
lifetime person is meal rice

miuh haeux ndaex gwn daeuj ndaex gai (It is) a meal of rice (you) can eat, then sell
meal rice to be able to eat to come able to sell

ciuh hunz zaeuh gijlai How long is the life of a person?
life person exactly is how many?

maih mbaeuq dai goq geq Although I am not dead, I am not getting younger
although Neg die also old

⁸⁰ Some words are likely sung, but are missed in the recording, because of when the device began to record. Since I have the document Huang was singing from, I mark these words in brackets.

Men Strophe 2

(yi) angq (ah) sin (ah) angq - (lw -) liu (ah) sin (ah) liu (na)
 mbaeuq (ah) angq (ah) lox - gvaq - miuh (laen)
 mbaeuq (ah) liu (ah) lox (ah) gvaq - sauh (le-) gvaq - sauh (eh) mag (ah) lien) gvaq - sauh (ah) diengz (laen)
 gaem (ah) cienz (yi-) bac (ah) lae (ah) cw (ah - lw -) gvaq - miah yux (ah) song (ah) laeuz (laen)
 mengz (ah) ciaz (ah) duz (ah) goj - mbaeuq (ah) (naeuz ah coh ah lae ae)

angq sin angq; liu sin liu Happiness is happiness; a smile is a smile
 happy is happy smile is smile

mbaeuq angq lox gvaq miuh (If) you aren't happy, (you) will pass the temple
 Neg happy will to pass temple

mbaeuq liu lox gvaq sauh (If) you don't smile, (you will) pass the time
 Neg smile will to pass time

gvaq sauh mag (You will) pass the time of the fruit (harvest);
 to pass time fruit

gvaq sauh diengz (You will) pass the time of the watermelon (harvest)
 to pass time watermelon

gaem cienz bae laez cw Where are you going to shop, clutching your money
 to clutch money to go where to buy

gvaq miah yux song laeuz (You are) passing the time of lovers, the two of us
 to pass time lover two us

mengz ciaz du goj mbaeuq (If) you invite us, (we'll) also refuse
 you invite us also Neg

Men Strophe 3

mengz (ah) goj - (ah) lwg (ah) bux (ah) hek (biu ah aih -) goq (ah) goj - (ah) lwg (ah) bux (ah) hek (yi) (na laen)

zaek (ah) dang (ah) fit (ah - de) caemh (ah) sien (na-) hunz (ah) dang (ah) biengz (ah) caemh (ah) sau (laen)

caemh (ah) miah mbauq - (lah -) caemh (ah) miah (ah) sau (laen)

fien (ah) doengh (ah) zaeuq (ah) saek (ah) gw - (lo -) fien (ah) doengh (ah) lwh (ah-) saek (ah-) coenz (laen)

gaiq - hoz naed (ah) goq (ho) loengz (laen)

gaiq (ah-) hoz - longz (ah) mbauq (ah) geq - (ngoenz ah liu ah lae ae)

mengz goj lwg bux hek
you also CL:child CL:person guest

You are a young guest

goq goj lwg bux hek
older brother also CL CL guest

I am also a young guest

zaek dang fit caemh sien
vegetables are to search up together garden

The vegetables are grouped by their garden

hunz dang biengz caemh sau
person are on earth together women

The people on earth are grouped by women

caemh miah mbauq
together to meet men

(They are) grouped by men

caemh miah sau
together to meet women

(They are) grouped by women

fien doengh zaeuq saek gw
fien mutually to request one moment

(We'll) mutually request a moment of fien

fien doengh lwh saek coenz
fien mutually exchange one utterance

(We'll) mutually exchange a strophe

gaiq hoz naed goq loengz
to open throat lump also to move down

I open my throat and my Adam's apple moves down

gaiq hoz longz mbaeuq geq
to open throat down Neg old

I open my throat down (and) am not old

Women Strophe 1

daep (ah) nuengx (ah) siengj - (lw - de) gueg (ah-) fien (laen)

lau (ah) gied (ah) gaeu (ah) gied (ah) giq (la -) lau (ah) gied (ah) gaeu (ah) moh (da) lix (laen)

lau (ah) gied (ah) giq - ciaz (ah) mai (laen)

baz gied (ah) goq - daeuj (ah) ndaq - (lo -) yah-(ah) gvai (ah) goq (ah) daeuj - nauh (laen)

cwz (ah) de (ah) laeuz (ah) yaeu (ah) san (ah) (ngoenz ah nix ah - lae ae)

daep nuengx siengj gueg fien
to come together sister to want to do fien

We come together, (and) I want to do fien

lau gied gaeu gied giq
afraid to bind stem bind CL:flower

(But I am) afraid the stem and flowers are bound

lau gied gaeu mohlix
afraid to bind stem jasmine

(I am) afraid the jasmine stems are bound

lau gied giq ciazmai
afraid to bind CL a kind of grass

(I am) afraid the grass is bound

baz gied goq daeuj ndaq
wife to bind brother to come to scold

(Your) wife binds you and is coming to scold (you)

yah gvai goq daeuj nauh
wife clever brother to come to quarrel

Your clever wife will come to quarrel

cwz de laeuz yaeu san
time that we worried

At that time, we will be worried

Men Strophe 4

daep (ah) nuengx (ah) ndaex (lw - de) gueg (ah) fien (laen)

mbaeuq gied gaeu gied giq (loh-) mbaeuq (ah) gied (ah) gaeu (ah) moh (de) lix (laen)

mbaeuq (ah) gied (ah) giq ciaz (ah) mai (laen)

baz gvai (ah-) gvan (ah) mbaeuq (ah) nauh - (lw -) goq (ah) gueg (ah) mbaeuq (ah) hong - hanz (laen)

coh (ah) cax (ah) nangz (ah) fien (ah) doiq (ah) (ngoenz ah nix ah lae ae)

daep nuengx ndaex gueg fien (We) come together, and you are able to do fien
to come together sister to be able to do fien

mbaeuq gied gaeu gied giq The stems and flowers are not bound
Neg to bind stem to bind CL:flower

mbaeuq gied gaeu mohlix The jasmine stems are not bound
Neg to bind stem jasmine

mbaeuq gied giq ciazmai The grass is not bound
Neg to bind CL a kind of grass

baz gvai gvan mbaeuq nauh My clever wife is not going to quarrel (with me)
wife clever husband Neg to quarrel

goq gueg mbaeuq honghanz I am a single man
older brother to do man single

coh cax nangz fien doiq So I can sing antiphonal songs with you
then to play woman fien antiphonal

Women Strophe 2

haet (ah) nix (ah) nuengx (ah) (lw - de) ok (ah) lanz (laen)

gvaq sam (ah) banz (ah) laemx (ah) lij - (lw -) gvaq siq (ah) banz (ah) bo (ah) nding (laen)

zaij (ah) daengz (ah) din (yi) ok (ah) bo - g (lw-) zaij - daengz (ah) ndok (ah) ndang (ah) lienz (laen)

bae (ah-) laez (ah) aeu (ah) fien (ha) doiq - (ngoenz ah nix ah lac ae)

haet nix nuengx ok lanz
morning this sister to move outward house

This morning, I went out of the house

gvaq sam banz laemx lij
to pass three CL water stream

I traveled past three streams

gvaq siq banz bo nding
to pass four CL mountain red

I traveled past four red mountains

zaij daengz din ok boeg
to walk to arrive leg to move outward to tie

I have walked until my legs don't work

zaij daengz ndok ndang lienz
to walk to arrive bones body shake

I have walked until my bones shake

bae laez aeu fien doiq
to go where to obtain fien antiphonal

Where can I go to sing antiphonal songs?

Men Strophe 5

haet (ah) nix (ah) nuengx (ah) (lw - de) ok (ah) lanz (laen)

gvaq sam (ah) banz (ah) laemx (ah) lij - (lw-) gvaq siq (ah) banz (ah) bo (ah) nding (laen)

zaij (ah) din (ah-) mbaeuq (ah) ok (ah) bo-k (lw-) nuengx (ah) ndok (ah) ndang (ah) mbaeuq (ah) lienz (laen)

gwnz (ah) leux (ah-) nangz (ah) cangh (ah) cax (ah) (lw) laj - leux (ah) nuengx (ah) cangh (ah) fien (laen)

naeuz (ah) haej - nangz (ah) fien (ah) doiq - (ngoenz ah nix ah lae ae)

haet nix nuengx ok lanz
morning this sister to move outward house

This morning, sister went out of the house

gvaq sam banz laemx lij
to pass three CL water stream

You traveled past three streams

gvaq siq banz bo nding
to pass four CL mountain red

You traveled past four red mountains

zaij din mbaeuq ok bok
to walk legs Neg to move outward to tie

You have walked, (but) your legs are not bound

nuengx ndok ndang mbaeuq lienz
sister bone body Neg shake

Sister's bones are not shaking

gwnz leux nangz cangh cax
above complete sister master play

On one hand, you are a master of playing

laj leux nuengx cangh fien
below complete sister master fien

On the other hand, sister is a master of fien

naeuz haej nangz fien duiq
to announce to give sister fien antiphonal

I will speak antiphonal songs to you

Women Strophe 3

(lw -) yamz (ah) gaem (ah) lie-ngj meh daengq (yi) (na laen)
 (yi) mbaeuq (ah) haej - naengh (ah) (lw - de ah) gwnz (ah) lin (laen)
 mbaeuq (ah) haej (ah) gim (ah) fien (ah) doiq - (ngoenz ah nix ah lae ae)

haet nix nuengx ok lanz⁸¹ This morning I have come out of the house
 morning this sister to move outward house

yamzgaem zaep meh siengq I grab my straw hat and think
 to quickly grab straw hat mother to think

yamzgaem liengj meh daengq I grab my umbrella and instruct
 to quickly grab umbrella mother to instruct

mbaeuq haej nangz gwnz linz (You) didn't give sister a rock (to sit) on
 Neg to give sister on rock

mbaeuq haej gim fien doiq (I) will not give (you) the treasure of singing songs (with me)
 Neg to give gold fien antiphonal

⁸¹ I show the full lyrics from Huang's lyric collection (2018a); the recording Huang gave me starts in the middle of this utterance, likely due to starting the recorder late, or a malfunction in the recording device.

Men Strophe 6

(yi)haet (ah) nix (ah) nuengx (ah) (lw - de ah) ok (ah) lanz (laen)

yamz gaem(ah) zaep (yi) meh siengj - (lw -) yamz (ah) gaem liengj (ah) meh daengq (yi) (na laen)

(yi)naeuz (ah) haej - naengh (ah) (lw - de) gwnz (ah) linz (laen)

(yi)naeuz (ah) haej - gim (ah) fien (ah) doiq - (gah laix ah lae ae)

haet nix nuengx ok lanz
 morning this sister to move outward house

This morning, sister has come out of the house

yamzgaem zot meh siengj
 to quickly grab hat mother to think

(You) quickly grab your hat and think

yamzgaem liengj meh daengq
 to quickly grab umbrella mother to instruct

(You) quickly grab your hat and instruct

naeuz haej naengh gwnz linz
 to announce to give to sit on stone

(I will) announce a stone (for you) to sit on

naeuz haej gim fien doiq
 to announce to give gold fien antiphonal

(I will) announce the treasure of singing songs

Women Strophe 4

(yi)sau (ah) ndi (ah) (ac -) ngoenz (ah-) nix (ah) (na laen)
 (yi) daep (ah) nuengx (ah) sie - ngj (lw - de) gueg (ah) fien (laen)
 (yi) fien (ah) nuengx (ah-) lix (ah) (lw - de) uq (ah) lanz (laen)
 fien nangz (ah) lix (ah-) uq (ah) gvih (lw-) bak (ah) ngi aen (ah) yoeg (ah) ciaz (laen)
 daengz biengz(yi) hai (ah) mbaeuq (ah) o-k lw - daengz (ah) biengz dog (ah-) mbaeuq (ah) ning (laen)
 cih (ah) goq (ah) dog (lw - de) ndaex (ah) ning (laen)
 gim (ah-) coh (ah) miz (ah) fien (ah) doiq(ah) (nacuz ah coh ah lac ac)

saundi ngoenz nix beautiful day this	Today is a beautiful day
daep nuengx siengj gueg fien to come together sister to think to do fien	(You) meet sister (and) want to do fien
fien nuengx lix uq lanz fien sister still to be at house	My fien is still at the house
fien nangz lix uq gvih fien sister still to be at cabinet	Sister's fien is still in the cabinet
bak ngi aen yoeg ciaz hundred two CL key	(It has) one hundred twenty keys
daengz biengz hai mbaeuq ok to arrive earth to open Neg to move outward	On earth, (nothing) can open it
daengz biengz dog mbaeuq ning to arrive earth only Neg to move	On earth, (nothing) can move it

cih goq dog ndaex ning
only older brother alone to be able move

Only you are able to move it

gim coh miz fien doiq
gold then to have fien antiphonal

Then you can have the treasure of singing fien (with me)

Men Strophe 7

sau (ah) ndi (ah) (ae -) ngoenz (yi) nix (ah) (na laen)
haej (ah) goq - nacuz (yi) haej (ah) nuengx (ah) (lw -) haej (ah) goq (ah) nacuz (ah) haej - nangz (laen)
(yi) goq miz (ah) bux - boh (ah) au uq zang (ah) fuh - (ae -) hai guj - daih (ah)[cang] (yi) faz (laen)
yoeg (ah) ciaz (ah) ma? (ah) miz (ah) leux (ah-) (lw) yaeg (ah) ciaz gveux - miz (ah) caez (laen)
doengz aen (ah-) laez (ah) goq o-k (lw -) dog (ah) aen laez (ah) goq -) ning (laen)
dauj (ah-) la (ah) gim (ah) fien (ah) doiq - (ngoenz ah nix ah lae ae)

sau di ngoenz nix
beautiful day this

Today is beautiful

haej goq naeuz haej nuengx
to give older brother to announce to give sister

Let me answer you

haej goq naeuz haej nangz
to give older brother to announce to give sister

Let older brother answer sister

goq miz bux boh au uq zhangfuh
older brother has CL uncle to obtain to be at urbanite

I have an uncle who lives in the city

hai guxdaih [cang]⁸² faz
to open ancient container iron

(He) opens ancient containers of iron

⁸² There are two possibilities for this character: one is *cang* (container) and the other is *cangh* (master). From listening to the recording and from context, I have selected container. If the correct word is *cangh*, it would result in the following translation: “(he is) a blacksmith who can open (what is) ancient.”

yoegciaz max miz leux
key whatever to have complete

Whatever keys exist, (he) has

yoegciaz gveux miz caez
key twist to have complete

Whatever shapes the keys are in, (he) has them all

doengz aen leiz goq ok
the same CL whatever also to move outward

Likewise, he can (also) extract anything

dog aen leiz goq ning
unique CL whatever also to move

Whatever is unique, he can also move

daeuj la gim fien doiq
to come to search gold fien antiphonal

(He) can find the treasure of singing fien

Huang Wenke (2018) Fien Va (Flower Song)

Men Strophe 1

sau (ah) ndi (ah) (ac -) ngoenz (ah-) nix (ah) (na laen)

hoj (ah) sik (ah-) giq (ac - de) va (ah) nding (laen)

daeb (ah) din (ah) hw - nj zang (ah) doe-ngh (lw-) hwnj (yi) zang (ah) doengh (ah) namh (yi) sa (laen)

va giaz (ah-) laez (ah) hom (ah) doix - (lw-) hom (ah) lumj (ah) oix (ah) laemx (ah) diengz (laen)

hunz (ah) dang (ah) biengz (ah) - dc dwg (ah) coh (laen)

dwg (ah) coh (ah) ndix (ah) - de fu (ah) da (laen)

doengh ha - ndix - fu (ah) ba-k (biu ah ai -) fu (ah) bak (ah) nuengx (ah) it (yi) gvai (ah) dauq (ah) ngi (ah) gvai (laen)

zungq (ah) biah nix (ah) (lw - de) ndi (ah-) caiz (laen)

guh haiz (ah-) nix - ndi (ah) ienq - (lw) demj (ah-) daeng (ah) liang (ah) ndix (ah) menz (laen)

(yi)cim (ah) mag (ah) cim (ah) (lw - de) giq (ah) gaeng (laen)

cim hunz (yi-) cim (yi) fu (ah) naj - (lw-) cim (ah) max (ah) cim (ah) fu (ah-) an (laen)

(yi)lwg (ah) bux - laez (ah) (lw - de) hao (ah-) hanz (laen)

nangz [he]? - laez - hau u-nq (lw-) naj - hau (ah) lun (ah) gim (hi) ngaenz (laen)

(yi) daenj (eh) zoengq (ah) biah (ah) (lw - de) hom (ah-) aen (laen)

gim ngaenz (yi-) gim (yi) lunz (ah) gienq - (lw -) naj - hau (ah) baeg (ah-) lij-(ah) ci (laen)

sau ndi (ah) lumj - (ah-) lwg (ah) saeq - (lw) lumj - (yi-) lwg (ah) saeq zangz (ah-) nganq (yi) (na laen)

la lumj (ah-) doiq (ah) za vanx (ai - de) ndae - daemz (laen)

(yi)daep (ah) goq - sie - ngj cuengq (ah) sep (ah - de) bae (ah-) yaemz (laen)

(yi)lau (ah) suj - daemz (ah) (lw - de) de-(ah) hah (laen)

(yi)lau (ah) boq (ae) ya (ah) (lw - de) de - daiz (laen)

haej (ah) gvan (ah) sae (ah) daoq (ah) zuq (ah) ngoenz ah nix ah lae ae

saundi ngonz nix
pretty day this

Today is a pretty day

hosik giq va nding
to have affection for CL flower red

(I) have affection for the red flower

daeb din hwnj zangdoengh
step foot to go up field

(I) place my foot up on the field

hwnj zangdoengh namh sa
to go up field soil sand

(I) go up to the field with sandy soil

va giazleiz homdoix
flower where fragrant

Where is the fragrant flower?

hom oix lumj diengz
fragrant sugar cane like sugar

The fragrance of sugarcane (is) like sugar

hunz dang biengz dwgcoh
person to be earth cute

Person on earth is attractive

dwgcoh ndix fu da
cute with rich eye

(Your) rich eyes (are) attractive

doengh ha ndix fu bag
together raindrop with rich mouth

(Your) lips are like raindrop trails meeting together

fu bag nuengx it gvai daoq ngi gvai
rich mouth sister one clever to return two clever

Sister's mouth is exceedingly clever

zungq biah nix ndi caiz
CL shirt this good to tailor

This shirt is well cut

guh haiz nix ndi ienq
CL shoe this good to form (with last)

These shoes are well lasted

demj daeng liang ndix menz
light lamp to shine with wick

The light of the lamp shines with the wick

cim mag cim giq gaenq
to examine fruit to examine CL stem

(I) examine the fruit, the flower, and stem

cim hunz cim fu naj
to examine person to examine rich face

(I) examine the person (and) examine the rich face

cim max cim fu an (I) examine the horse and examine the rich saddle
to examine horse to examine rich saddle

lwg bux laez haohanz Who is this pretty young person?
CL CL who pretty

nanz (he)? laez hao unq Who is the sister white and soft?
sister who white soft

naj haulun gimngaenz The cheeks are pink as white gold
face pink gold

daenj zungq biah hom aen (You) are wearing fragrant clothes
to wear CL clothes fragrant CL

gim ngaenz gim lunz giengq (They have) gold alternating with glass
gold gold to alternate glass

naj hao baeg lij zi (Your) face is white as *lichi* fruit
face white lichi

sau ndi lumj lwg saeq (You) are beautiful like the daughter of an official
pretty like CL government official

lumj lwg saeq zangz nganq (You are) like the daughter of an official in the center of town
like CL official center of town

la lumj deuz za vanx ndae daemz (I) look at a pair of grass carp in a pond
to look pair grass carp in pond

daep goq siengj cuengq sep bae yaemz Brother wants to place a hook and go fish
to draw brother to think to place hook to go to fish

lau suj daemz de hah (But I) am afraid the master of the pond will protect (you)
afraid master pond he to protect

lau boqya de daiz (I) am afraid he supports this woman
afraid woman he to support

haej gvansae daoq zuq (This) will make me return empty-handed
to give husband to return empty

Huang Miaofan Assorted Songs (Huang, Li, Ling, Huang, and Qin 2018)

Strophe 1

(yi) gah laix - (ac -) laemx (ah) baq - loengz (ah) (lw - dc) [yi - ieu]? (laen)
 bux (ah) laez cwj - caeuz (ah) deq - meh (ah) geq - nuengx (ah) mbaeuq (ah) miz (laen)
 (ah) fiz (ah) ndaep (yi-) bux (ah) laez (ah) daengz (ah) (lo-) laemx (ah) duq bux (ah) laez aeu (laen)
 gwn (ah) caeuz (ah-) coh (ah) aeu (ah) laemx (ah) (lw -) daenz (ah) sok (ah) laemx (ah) dai (ah) lix (laen)
 (yi) gah laix - (ac -) gag (yi) dai (ah) un (ah) (lw - dc) gag (ah) lix (laen)
 gag (ah) dai (ah) lix (ah) gag (ah) hwnj (ah) (gah laix - lac ac)

laemx baq loengz [yi ieu]? The water flows down the slope []?
 water clay slope to move downward

bux laez cwj caeuz deq Who will cook dinner and wait for me?
 CL who to cook dinner to wait

meh geq nuengx mbaeuq miz Sister does not have an old mother
 mother old sister Neg have

fiz ndaep bux laez daengz When the fire is out, who will come (to light it)
 fire to extinguish CL who to arrive

laemx duq⁸³ bux laez aeu When the water is empty, who will get more
 water empty CL who to take up

gwn caeuz coh aeu laemx (I) eat dinner and then go to get water
 to eat dinner then to take up water

daengz sok laemx dai lix (I) come to the dock, faint, and revive
 to arrive dock water to die to live

⁸³ This is likely a localized pronunciation of the word *zuq*, which also means empty.

gag dai'un gag lix
alone to faint alone to live

(I) faint alone (and) I revive alone

gag dai lix gag hwnj
alone to die to live alone to get up

(I) die (and) come to life alone, (and) I get up alone

Strophe 2

(yi) gah laix - ae - ngoenz (ah) nix - ndi (ah) (lw - de) (ah) yen (ah-) ndi (laen)
hun (ah) mbaeuq (ah) doek (yi) (lei biux ah ae) zaj - mbaeuq (ah) laez (laen)
cae (ah) laez cae (oh) naz hw - swq - mbaeuq (ah) hwnj (ae-) mbaeuq (ah) loengz (laen)
(yi) gah laix - (ae -) gueg (ah) yux - doek (ah) (lw - de) (ah) lanz (ah) doengz (laen)
gueg (ah) yux (ah) doengh (ah) la-nz goq - mae (ah) aen (ah) cae (ae)

ngoenz nix ndi yen ndi
day this good upon good

Today is better and better

hun mbaeuq doek
rain Neg drop

The rain (is) not falling

zaj mbaeuq laez
thunder Neg to sound

The thunder (is) not sounding

cae laez cae naz hw
to plow where to plow field dry

Where can (I) plow; (I) plow a dry field

swq mbaeuq hwnj mbaeuq loengz
to split (wood) Neg to move up Neg to move down

(I) split wood (and it) won't budge

gueg yux doek lanz doengz
how to drop down family close friend

How can you progress to being a close friend?

gueg yux doengh lanz goq
 how to pass through family brother

How can you progress to being a brother

mae aencae
 think no hope

(I) think this is hopeless

Strophe 3

(yi) gah laix (ah-) (ae -) ngoenz (ah) nix - ndi (ah) (lo - de) (ah) yen (ah) ndi (laen)

(ha) gij - baiz (ah) giq - (lo - dc) goq (oh) liz (laen)

gij (ah) goq liz (ah-) henz(ah) mbanx(ah) (lw-) gij - goq van (ah-) hen (ah) zoeg (yi) (na laen)

(yi) nuengx (ah) haeuj (ah) zoeg (ah-) naeuz zoc-g (yi-) nuengx (ah) ok (ah) lanz (ah-) naeuz (ah) lanz (laen)

(yi) naeuz (ah-) aen (ah) mbanx (ah) (lw - de) zingq (ah) zang (laen)

naeuz (ah) aen (ah-) lanz (ah) mengz (yi) goq - (gah laix ah lae ae)

ngoenz nix ndi yen ndi
 day this good upon good

Today is better and better

gij baiz giq goq liz
 a few line CL tree banyan

(There are) a few lines of banyan trees

gij goq liz henz mbanx
 a few tree banyan next to village

A few banyan trees (are) next to the village

gij goq van henz zoeg
 a few trees (a kind of tree) next to yard

A few trees (are) next to the yard

nuengx haeuj zoeg naeuz zoeg
 sister to enter yard to praise yard

Sister enters the yard and praises it

nuengx ok lanz naeuz lanz
 sister to move outward house to praise house

Sister comes out of the house and commends it

naeuz aen mbanx zingq zang
to praise CL village at the center

(I) praise the central village

naeuz aen lanz mengz goq
to praise CL house you brother

(I) praise the house of you brother

Strophe 4

(yi) gvai (ah -) laex (yi ae -) ngoenz (ah) nix (ah-) (lou laen)

(yi) ngoenz (ah) nix - ndi (ah) (lo - de) (ah) yen (ah-) ndi (laen)

(yi) dock (ah) sik (yi -) daemj (ah-) dock (ah) sik (yi) (nw-) dock (ah) sik (ah) giq - va - hau (laen)

cang? (ah) yaeuz hwnj (ah-) doengh (ah) biengz (ndw-) si? (ah) bieng? - mbae (ah) (de ah-) gom laen

ngiq (ah) va - hom (ah-) dwg (ah) iq - (lo-) giq nix (ah) cin (ah-) va - vuengz (laen)

(yi) gah laix - (ae -) lwg (ah) suj - lox (ah) (lw - de) (ah) lwg (ah-) vuengz (laen)

lox (ah) lwg (ah-) vuengz (ah-) faeq giq - lox (ah-) faeq (ah) giq - baih (ah-) gwnz (laen)

yaemz (ah) din (ah-) mengz (ah-) dwg (ah) maij - (nw-) yaemz (ah) zaij (ah-) goq - dwg (ah-) da (laen)

(yi) gah laix - (ae -) daenj (ah-) zungj (ah) biah - hoz (ah-) va (laen)

hab (ah) coenq (ah) va - dai (ah) zocm - gvaq laj laemh (ah) dacuj (ah-) yacuz (laen)

(yi) gah laix (ae -) a (gah) cuengq (ah-) lox (ah) (lw - de) (ah) a (gah-) aeu (laen)

(ah) cuengq (ah-) laeh (ah) gvet - (lw - de) (ah) saem (ah-) doz (laen)

aeu (ah) laeh (ah) yenz (ah) bux (ah) aen (yi) (gah) laix ah - lae - ae

gvaq laj laemh daeuj yaeuz
to pass under shadow to come to travel

(He) passes under the shadow traveling this way

a cuengq lox a aeu
to want to place or is to want to obtain

(Do I) want to set (the flower) down or take it up?

cuengq Leah gvet saemdoz
to place example to hurt heart

If (I) set (it) down, (it) will hurt (my) heart

aeu laeh yenz buxaen
to obtain example to grasp another person

If (I) obtain (the flower), (I) will be cheating on someone

Strophe 5

(yi) [naeuz] (ah) maoh (ah) zaep (ah) (lw - de) ndi (ah) moq (laen)

cih boh (ah-) ndi (ah) lwg (ah-) (lw - de) doengz (ah-) ndi (laen)

ndi (ah) baenz (ah-) lwg (ah-) si cnj - (ni-) bak (ah) goq - gangq (ah) gvengq (yi) gvai (laen)

(yi) gah laix - (ae -) ndvn (ah) uq - goengx (ah) hunz (ah) lai (laen)

(ah) coenz (ah) gangj (ah) gvai (ah) hingz (ah-) doih (nw-) la lu-mj doiq fu?(ah-) yoeng? (laen)

[]? (ah) baenz (ah-) lwg (ah-) bux (ah) bae - zang (ah) ngan (ah) (nw-) la lumj doiq - za van (ah) uq - ndac (ah) daemz (laen)

(yi) gah laix - (yi ae-) nuengx cuengq (ah) sep (ah) bae (ah-) yaemz (laen)

daemz (ah) (de ah-) miz (ah-) bux hah - (lw) haej - nuengx (ah) la - daeuq - ndiai (laen)

(ha) ngui (ah) giq - ngonz (ah) ndang (ah) unq (ah) mengz (ah) lox - miz (ae)

[naeuz] maoh zaep ndi moq
praise hat straw hat good new

(I) praise (your) new straw hat

cih boh ndi lwg doengz ndi
if father good child close friend good

If the father (is) good, my close friend (is) good

ndi baenz lwg si enj (He) is good like a child pushing his chest out
good to complete child small to push chest out

bak goq gangq gvenq gvai Brother's mouth always has clever speech
mouth brother to say habitually clever

ndwn uq goengx hunz lai (He) stands in a crowd of many
to stand to be at crowd people many

coenz gangj gvai hingz doih (His) clever words win his companions
utterance to say clever to win companions

la lumj doiq fu? yoeng? (We) look like a pair of birds
to look to be like pair embroidered birds

[]? baenz lwg bux bae zang ngan (We) are like children going to the market
to complete child CL to go market

la lumj doiq za vanx uq ndaex daemz (We) look like a pair of carp in the pond
to look to be like pair grass carp to be at in pond

nuengx cuengq sep bae yaemz Sister will set a hook and go fishing
sister to place hook to go to fish

daemz miz bux hah (But) the pond has an owner
pond to have CL claim

haej nuengx la daeuq ndiai (This) makes sister look (and) return empty handed
to give sister to look to return empty

ngui giq ngoenz ndang unq For a few days, (I) have no energy, and I am weak
no energy a few day body soft

A Shan'ge Meeting in Celebration of the Wei Family Wedding (Xiao Yang 2012)

Men Strophe 1

(yi) sau (ah-) ndi (ah - ae) ngoenz (ah-) nix (oh na laen)

ngoenz (ah) nix(ah) ndi - liang (ah) lih (lo -) haej - bux (ah) dauh (ah) ciek (ah) gi (laen)

la (hah) ngoenz (ah) ndi (ah) cux (ah) bacx (ah-) (lo -) caz lacx - lamz (ah) dacb (ah) lamz (laen)

caem (ah) cingz (ah) lap (pi) dem (ah) la-p (lo-) ban (ah) lap (ah) bac (ah) lanz (ah) hunz (laen)

(yi) ngoenz (ah) nix (ah - ai -) cux (ah) nangx (ah) baex - (aeh - de) naj (hah) mwanz (laen)

cux (ah) lwg (ah) hunz (ah-) bak (ah) macq - (loh -) boh - da (ah) cacmh(ah) auc (ah-) lax (oh) (na laen)

(yi) miz (ah-) caz (hah) laex - (ae - de) caem (ah) cingz (laen)

moeg (ah) nding (ah) zungq - dem (ah) zungq - (loh -) miz (ah) daengz mbonq - haij - mienz (laen)

miz (ah) denj(ah) ci (ah) bingx (ah) sieng - (loh -) doengz (ah) yiengh (ah) baij - lim (ah) lanz (laen)

[zaz] (ah) cang (ah) baij (ah-) lim (ah) ok - (loh -) daengz (ah) baih log (yi) baih (ah-) ndae (laen)

(yi) baih (ah) log (ah) goj - (aeh - de -) lim (ah) caez (laen)

baih (ah) ndae (ah) goj - lij (ah) doh (loh -) doengz (ah) yiengh (ah) loh - loh - miz (laen)

bacz (ah) nix (ah) dc (hc) mbacuq (ah) hiq - (loh -) ndaex (ah) hunz (ah) da - ng ndaex (oh) caiz (laen)
 (yi) ndaex (ah-) nangz (ah) baex - (aeh - de) bak (ah) gvai (laen)
 seng (ah) lwg (ah) sai (ah) lox - lai (ah) (loh -) ndaex (ah) nuengx (ah) baex-) caux (ah) cin (laen)
 (yi) gah laix (ah - ae -) doengh (ah) ndaex (ah-) ngaenz (ah) (ach - de) ndaex (ah) gim (laen)
 hunz (ah) lai (ah) cim (ah) daengz (ah-) naiz dock (yi) yag (loh -) ax bak (ah) laemx (ah) da (hah) lac (laen)
 (yi) deangz (ah) bux (ah-) mbanx (ah) (loh - de) bux (ah-) fac (laen)
 zaez (ah) cenj (ah) laeuj - yah (ah) moq - (loh -) daengz (ah) ndien (ah) cieng (ah) bi (ah) moq - (na laen)
 miz (ah) lwg (ah) lai (ah) caemz (ah) hoq - (loh -) boh (ah) meh coh - vuen (ah) yungz (laen)
 gvan (ah) baz - coh vaiq (ah) viet (yi) (gah laix ah lae ae)

sauhndi ngoenz nix
beautiful day this

Today is a good day

ngoenz nix ndi liengz lih
day this good very profitable

Today is good and profitable

haej buxdauh ciek gi
to give Daoist to find auspicious

Let the Daoists find an auspicious day

la ngoenz ndi cux baex
to look for day good receive daughter in law

(They) look for a good day to receive the bride

caz laex lamz daeb lamz
tea gift basket to pile up basket

Gift baskets of tea are piled on each other

caemcingz lap dem lap
gifts pole increased degree pole

The gifts (are brought in) pole after pole

ban lap bae lanz hunz The poles (bearing gifts) are moved to the house of another
to move pole to go house person

cux nuengxbaex naj mwnz (We) receive the daughter in law with the round face
to receive daughter in law face round

cux lwg hunz bak maeq (We) receive the young bride with the pink mouth
to receive child person mouth pink

boh da caemh aeu laex The father of the bride also receives gifts
father of bride also to take up gift

miz caz laex caemcingz (They) have tea gifts and other gifts
to have tea gift gift

moeg nding zungq dem zungq The quilts are one after the other
quilt red CL increased degree CL

miz daengz mbonq haij mienz (They) It is to the point of having a sponge mattress
to have to arrive mattress sponge

miz dencij bingsieng (They) have a TV and a refrigerator
to have television refrigerator

doengzyiengh baij lim lanz The objects are piled and are filling the house
object to pile full house

[zaz] cang baij lim ok (The gifts) are piled till they overflow from the storehouse
to block storehouse to pile full to move outward

daengz baihlog baihndae (The gifts) arrive outside and inside
to arrive outside inside

baihlog goj lim caez (Even) outside (of the storehouse) is also full (of gifts)
outside also full evenly

baihndae goj lij doh Inside is also full
inside also to put enough

doengzyiengh lohloh miz (They) have gifts of all kinds
object all kinds to have

baez nix de mbaeuq hiq This time (the groom) is not worried
time this he Neg worry

ndaex hunz dang ndaex caiz to obtain person to be to obtain wealth	To obtain a person is like obtaining wealth
ndaex nuengxbaex bak gvai to obtain daughter in law mouth clever	(We) obtain a clever daughter in law
seng lwg sai lox lai to give birth child male to know many	(She will) give birth to smart male child
ndaex nuengxbaex caeux cin to obtain daughter in law to keep filial piety	(We) obtain a respectful daughter in law
doengh ndaex ngaenz ndaex gim together to obtain money to obtain gold	It is like obtaining money or gold
hunz lai cim daengz naiz doek yag person many to examine to arrive drool drop drool	Many people have looked and seen to the point of drooling
ax bak laemx da lae to open mouth water eye to flow	(They) open their mouths, (and) tears flow from their eyes
deangz bux mbanx bux fae to arrive CL village CL family name	This happens to those of every village and name
zaez cenj laeuj yah moq to long for cup alcohol woman new	(They) long for a toast with the new bride
deangz ndien cieng bi moq to arrive month spring festival year new	The lunar new year (will) come
miz lwg lai caemz hoq to have child many to play knee	(They) will have many children playing around the knee
boh meh coh vuen yungz father mother then to be happy unrestrained	The mother and father will be very joyful
gvan baz coh vaiqvied husband wife then happy	The husband and wife will be happy

Women Strophe 1

(yi) sau (ah-) ndi (ah - ai) ngoenz (ah-) nix (oh na laen)

(li) nai (ah) gauh (ah-) nix (ah) goj ndaex - (loh -) laex - gauh (ah) nix - goj (ah) baenz (laen)

(yi) naeuz (ah) mbaeuq - deangz (ah-) mbaeuq (ah) doh (loh -) cingz (ah-) cingz (ah) goh - yenz (ah) lieng (laen)

(yi) bix (ah) nuengx (aeh - ai -) coiq - lwg (ah) bux - (aeh - de) banh (ah) biengz (laen)

loengz (ah) biengz (ah-) gueg (ah) ga vaq - (loh -) haeuj - lanz (ah) meh - gwn (ah) ngai (laen)

(yi) bix (ah) nuengx (aeh - ai) cing? (ah) coiq - bak (yi) (aeh - de) mbaeuq (ah) gvai (laen)

(yi) mbaeuq (ah-) lox naeuz - (loh - de) (ah) lox nai (laen)

zo (ah) lwg (ah) sai (ah) nangz (ah) baex - (loh -) haej (ah-) gwn (ah) cenj (ah) laeuj (ah-) nding (laen)

mingz (ah) daeuz (ah) sang - gvaq saeq - (loh-) haej - cing? (vah) miz (ah-) fuk (yi) sach (ah) (na laen)

(yi) bi (ah) moq - ndaex - (oh - de) lwg (ah) ngcz (na-) daengz (ah) zungq - doj - nau (ah) ycz (laen)

lwg (ah) ngez umx (ah-) zaeuj (ah) hoq - (loh -) boh (ah) meh coh - veunh (ah-) yungz (laen)

lumz (ah) cien (ah) hoj - fanh (ah-) hiq - (gah laix ah lac ac)

sauhndi ngoenz nix
pretty day this

Today is a pretty day

nai gauhnix goj ndaex
to praise this way also to obtain

Praising this way is sufficient

laex gauhnix goj baenz
gift this way also to achieve

These gifts are excellent

naeuz mbaeuq deangz mbaeuq doh (Our) praising is not very good
to announce Neg to arrive Neg enough

cingz cingz goq yenzlieng Please forgive (us)
to invite to invite also to forgive

coiq lwg bux banhbiengz I am a wandering child
I CL CL wanderer

loengz biengz gueg ga vaq (I) have come down to earth as a beggar
to come down earth to do beggar

haeuj lanz meh gwn ngai (I) come in to your mother's house to eat
to move inward house mother to eat breakfast

cing?coiq bak mbaeuq gvai Our mouths are not clever
us mouth Neg clever

mbaeuq lox naeuz lox nai (We) don't know how to announce or praise
Neg to know to announce to know to praise

zo lwg sai nangz baex We thank the son and daughter in law
to thank child male daughter in law

haej gwn cenj laeuj nding (They) gave (us) a cup of red wine
to give to drink cup wine red

mingzdaeuz sang gvaq saeq (They) have a name higher than the officials
good name high to pass government official

haej cing? miz fuk saeh (They can) let me have wealth in my business
to give me to have wealth business

bi moq ndaex lwg ngez (They) will have a child by the New Year
year new to obtain CL child

daengzzungq doj nauyez Everything will be lively
everything all lively

lwg ngez umx zaeuj hoq The children will hug (their) knees
CL child to hug knee

boh meh coh vuenhyungz Mother and father will be joyous
father mother then exceedingly happy

lumz cien hoj fanh hiq (They will) forget all poverty and worries
 to forget thousand poverty ten thousand worry

Men Strophe 2

(yi) sau (ah-) ndi (ah - ac -) ngoenz (ah-) nix (oh na laen)

(yi) haet (ah-) nix (ah) coiq - (ach - de) ok (ah) lanz (laen)

[ngan]? (ah) gaem (ah) zaep (ah-) gwn (ah) hiq - (loh-) giq - daengz (ah) bux (ah) mengz (ah) nangz (laen)

bo (ah) sang (ah) baenz (ah-) bo daemq - (loh -)zaj (ah) haemh (ah) baenz - zaj (ah) ngoenz (laen)

(yi) hoen (ah) haeux - daengz (ah) hoen (ah) hwq - (loh-) sen - ngwz (ah) haej - doengh (ah) haen (laen)

(yi) gvai (ah) nuengx (ah - ai -) lau (ah) hacux (ah) bienq - (ach - de) baenz (ah) vaeng (laen)

gvan (ah) siuj - saem (ah) gwn (ah) hiq - (loh-) hiq - lau (ah) nuengx baenz (ah) lanz (laen)

[gonq] (ah) nangz (ah) [goq] - [liz] (ah) laez (loh-) deq - nuengx (ah) mbacuq - haen (ah) coenz (laen)

lau (ho) doengz (ah) loeng (ah -) baenz (ah) meh (loh -) gvan (ah) gunj (ah-) ndwn (ah) gunj (ah) deq - (na laen)

(yi) gah laix (ah - ai -) bi (ah) ndien (ah) geq - (ach - de) [ngoenz (ah) cangz] (laen)

(yi) deq nuengx (ah) baenz (ah) (ach - de) hok (ah) lanz (laen)

deq (he) nangz (ah) baenz-(ah) gueg (ah) maj - (loh-) faiq - (ah-)ndi (ah) haej - [fiaz]? (ah) daz (laen)

naz ndi (ah) haej - [fiaz]? laeq - (loh -) bit (ah) gaeq - haej - [fiaz]? - zaeng (laen)

(yi) gvai (ah) nuengx (ah - ai -) ngoenz (ah) nix (ah) daeuj - (ach - de) docngh (ah) haen (laen)

(yi) saem (ah) ndi - zaenz (ah) lox - nacuh - (cam ah nuengx ah lac ac)

sauhndi ngoenz nix
beautiful day this

Today is beautiful

haet nix coi q ok lanz
morning this I to move outward house

This morning I go out of the house

[ngan]? gaem zaep gwnhiq
to clutch straw hat to sigh (worry)

I clutch my hat and sigh

giq daengz bux mengz nangz
to remember to arrive CL you sister

I remember to go to you sister

bo sang baenz bo daemq
mountain high to achieve mountain short

The high mountains change to low ones

zajhaemh baenz zajngoenz
night to achieve day

The night turns to day

hoen haeux daengz hoen hwq
road slippery to achieve road dry

The mushy roads turn dry

sen ngwz haej doengh haen
early to hope to give mutual to meet

It is (still) early to hope for us to meet

lau haeux bienq baenz vaeng
afraid rice to change to achieve weed

I am afraid the rice has changed to weeds

gvan siujaem gwnhiq
husband cautious to sigh (worry)

I am cautious (and) sigh

hiqlau nuengx baenz lanz
afraid sister to achieve house

I am afraid sister (already) has a home

[gonq] nangz [goq] [liz] laez
before sister also to leave long

Before sister also left to a distant place

deq nuengx mbaeuq haen coenz
to wait sister Neg to meet utterance

I wait for sister (but) don't hear anything

lau doengz loeng baenz meh
afraid friend wrong to achieve mother

I am afraid my friend has wrongly become another

gvan gunj ndwn gunj deq
husband always to stand always wait

I am always standing and waiting

bi'ndien geq [ngoenz cangz]
age old day to hide

(my) age is old (and) days are hidden

deq nuengx baenz hoklanz
to wait sister to achieve family property

(I) am waiting for sister to have the family land

baex nuengx baenz gueg maij
daughter in law to achieve lover

(I) am waiting for the bride to become a lover

faiq ndi haej [fiez]? daz
cotton good to give to pull

(If) the cotton is good, (it is)? pulled

naz ndi heij [fiez]? laeq
field good to give to plow

(If) the field is good, (it is)? plowed

bit gaeq heij [fiez]? zhaeng
duck chicken to give to cage

(If) the chicken and duck are good, (they are)? caged

ngoenz nix daeuj doengh haen
day this to arrive mutual to meet

Today I arrive to meet with you

saem ndi zaez lox naeuh
heart good to long for or is Neg

(Can I) hope for your affection or is this hopeless?

Women Strophe 2

(yi) sau (ah-) ndi (ah - ai) ai ngoenz (ah-) nix (oh na laen)

(yi) haet (ah-) nix (ah) nuengx - (ah - de) ok (ah) lanz (laen)

yaemz (ah) gaem (ah) liengj - gwn (ah) hiq - (ah -) gwn (ah) hiq - haen (ah-) ndoi (oh-) sang laen)

(yi) bux (ah-) laez (ah-) lox da - ngoenz (ah) nix dacuj - (ah - dc) bungz (oh-) gvan (laen)

bux (ah) laez (ah-) lox ndc - ngoenz (ah) nix - dacuj (ah) bungz (ah) goq - (loh-) dactj (ah-) biah va haiz (ah) moq - (na laen)

(yi) soh (ah-) baenz (ah) doh - (ah - de) ok (ah-) longz

lumj (ah) baenz (ah-) ngiaz - ok (ah-) conggh (loh -) coenz (ah) gangi dungq saem (ah-) daeuz laen)

nacuz (ah) nangz(ah) bacx - mbacuc (ah) dauq - (loh-) hacuc (ah-) nacuz (ah) nuengx (ah-) mbacuc (ah-) dacgz laen)

[ngaem]ʔ (ah) nacuz (ah-) nangz (ah-) bacx (ah) laez (loh -) nuengx (ah-) caemh (ah) ndwn (ah) caemh (ah) deq - (na laen)

(yi) gah laix (ah - ai -) ndwn (ah) baenz (ah) ciuh - (ah - de) lwg (ah-) ngez (laen)

(yi) deq (ah-) baenz (ah) ciuh - (ah - de) lwg (ah) lan (na-) baenz (ah) lot (ih) haq - li (oh-) gvan (laen)

(yi) baenz (ah) lot (ah-) gvan (ah) li (ah) goq - (loh -) mbacuc (ah-) lox muengh (ah) bux (ah-) laez (laen)

haen (ah) bae (ah) mbacuc - (ah-) haen (ah) dauq - (loh -) muengh (ah) yux - laux (ah) ciuh (ah-) hunx (laen)

(yi) lumz (ah) baet (yi) zai (ah-) va denz (ah-) (ah -) nuengx (ah) mbacuc (ah) bac (ah-) bux (ah) aen - (yi-) (na laen)

(yi) lix (ah-) dwg (ah) [ngaem - nz](ah - de) yenz (ah-) mengz (laen)

(yi) ngoenz (ah-) nix (ah) daeuj - (ah - de) doengh (ah-) bungz (laen)

(yi) mengz (ah) lix - zaiz (ah) lox - aiq - (cam ah so ah- lac ae)

sauhndi ngoenz nix
pretty day this

Today is pretty

haet nix nuengx ok lanz
morning this sister to move outward house

This morning I went out of the house

yaemz gaem liengj gwnhiq
tightly grasp umbrella to sigh (worry)

(I) tightly grasp my umbrella and sigh

gwnhiq hwnj ndoi sang
to sigh (worry) to ascend mountain high

I am worried about ascending the high mountain

bux laez loxda ngoenz nix daeuj bungz gvan
CL who to know day this to come to run into husband

who knows if today I meet you?

bux laez loxnde ngoenz nix daeuj bungz goq
CL who to know day this to come to run into brother

who knows if today I meet brother?

daenj biah va haiz moq (I) wear flower-print clothes and new shoes
to wear clothes flower shoe new

soh baenz doq ok longz (I am) truly a wasp coming out of the hive
truly to achieve wasp to move outward hive

lumj baenz ngiaz ok congh (I am) like a snake coming out of its hole
is like to achieve snake to move outward hole

coenz gangj dungq saem daeuz Saying (your) utterance has gone to (my) heart and head
utterance to say to lead to heart head

naeuz nangzbaex mbaeuq dauq (You) announce the bride has not returned
to announce daughter in law Neg to return

haeuqnaeuz nuengx mbaeuq daengz (You) state I have not arrived
to announce (negative connotation) sister Neg arrive

(ngaem)? naeuz nangzbaex laez (You) have announced the bride is (still) far
to announce sister in law far

nuengx caemh ndwn caemh deq I am always standing and waiting
sister always to stand always to wait

ndwn baenz ciuh lwg ngez (I) stand through the age of being able to have children
to stand to achieve lifetime CL child

deq baenz ciuh lwglan (I) wait through the age of having grandchildren
to wait to achieve lifetime grandchild

baenz lot haq li gvan For you, (I) have dropped marrying
to achieve to loose to marry because husband

baenz lot gvan li goq For you, (I) have let go of (having) a husband
to achieve to loose husband because brother

mbaeuq lox muengh bux laez (I) don't know who to hope for
Neg to know to hope CL who

haen bae mbaeuq haen dauq (If we) meet, (I) go; (If we) don't meet, (I) return
to meet to go Neg to meet to return

muengh yux laux ciuh hunx (I) hope (my) lover (has) a full life
to hope lover CL lifetime person

lumz baet zai va denz
wind to blow top of flower (kind of flower)

The wind has blown over the top of the flower

nuengx mbaeuq bae buxaen
sister Neg to go another person

(But) sister has not gone to another

lix dwg [ngaenz] yenz mengz
still is money predestined relationship you

I am still predestined for you

ngoenz nix daeuj doengh bungz
day this to come mutual to meet

Today (I) come to meet you

mengz lix zaiz lox aiq
you still love or is don't love

Do you love me, or are you uninterested?

Shan'ge Call and Response (Xiao Chang 2003)

Women Strophe 1

ngoenz (ah) nix (ah) daeuj (ah) bung (ah) goq - (lo-) doq - daengz (ah) nuengx (ah-) doq - cam (laen)
doq daengz (ah-) nuengx (ah-) doq dongx (ah-) (lw -) cam (ah) goq - acu (ah) aen-(ah-) loi (laen)
cam gvan (ah-) aeu (ah-) aen (ah) giengq - (lw-) ndaex (ah) gie - ngq nuengx (ah-) caemh (ah-) boiz (laen)
ndaex loi (ah-) nangz (ah-) caemh (ah) giq - (lo-) giq - uq (ah) dungx (ah-) uq - saem (laen)
(yi)gvai (ah) biux (ae -) ndaex (ah) gie - ngq cih (ah) (lw - de - ah) boiz (ah-) gaen (laen)
(yi) naem (ah) aek (ah-) baenz (ah) lox (ah) mbaeuq - (ngoenz ah nix ah lae ae)

ngoenz nix daeuj bung goq
day this to come to bump into brother

Today, I run into you

doq daengz nuengx doq cam
immediately to arrive sister immediately to ask

As soon as I arrive, I ask (you)

doq daengz nuengx doq dongx As soon as I arrive, I immediately greet (you)
 immediately to arrive sister immediately to greet

cam goq aeu aen loi (I) ask if brother can give me a comb
 to ask brother to take up CL comb

cam gvan aeu aen giengq (I) ask if you can give me a mirror
 to ask husband to take up CL mirror

ndaex giengq nuengx caemh boiz (If I) obtain a mirror, I will compensate (you)
 to obtain mirror sister also to compensate

ndaex loi nangz caemh giq (If I) obtain a comb, I will remember (it)
 to obtain comb sister also to remember

giq uq dungx uq saem (I will) remember in my stomach and heart
 to remember to be at stomach to be at heart

ndaex giengq cih boiz (If I) obtain a mirror, then (I will) compensate
 to obtain mirror then compensate

naem aek baenz lox mbaeuq (You) consider whether this is enough or not
 to consider mind to achieve or Neg

Men Strophe 1

(yi) bak (ah-) gvai (ac -) gvai (ah-) nuengx (ah) (na laen)

(yi) nuengx (ah -) cam (ah) goq - (ac - de ah) acu (ah) loi (laen)

nangz (ah) cam (ah-) gvan (ah-) aeu (ah) gie-ngq (lw-) a - aeu (ah) mbaeuq (ah) se-nq (yi) cam (laen)

gvan (ah) bi (ah-) fwngz (ah-) daeuj (ah) zuq - (lw-) goq - bi (ah) fwngz (ah-) daeuj (ah) ndiai (laen)

haej (ah) mengz (ah-) cam (ah) dauq - (ah-) zuq - (ah) (gah laix ah - lae - ae)

bak gvai gvai nuengx
mouth clever clever sister

Sister's mouth is clever

nuengx cam goq aeu loi
sister to ask brother to take up comb

Sister asks brother for a comb

nangz cam gvan aeu giengq
sister to ask husband to take up mirror

Sister asks me for a mirror

a aeu mbaeuq senq cam
to want to take up Neg first to ask

(She) is not the first to ask for these things

gvan bi fwngz daeuj zuq
husband to wave hand to come empty

I wave my hand to show it is empty

goq bi fwngz daeuj ndiai
brother to wave hand to come empty

I wave my hand and nothing comes

haej mengz cam zuq
to give you to ask empty

I have let you ask for nothing

Women Strophe 2

(yi) gwq - ndiei (ah) nuengx (ah-) (ah - de)(ah) mbaeuq (ah-) cam (laen)

haet (ah) nix (ah-) nangz (ah-) hwnj (ah) daeuj - (lw -) daengz (ah) zaeuj (ah) doh - ndiai (ah-) loi (laen)

(yi) daengz(ah) naj - doh - ndiai (ah) siaiq - (lw-) nuengx (ah) gvach - bo - daeb (ah-) bo (laen)

nangz gvach (ah) baq - daeb (ah) baq - (lw-) zaij - gva (ah) laj (ah-) acm?(ah-) nu? (laen)

du cih (ah-) dwg (ah-) lumz (ah) gie-ngq (lo -) lumz (ah) acn (ah) giengq (ah-) gacu?- ngo? (laen)

[bw]? miz (ah-) loi (ah-) loi (ah) zaeuj - (lw -) nuengx (ah) daeuj (ah) gaoh (ah-) nix (ah) hoen (laen)

zaij daengz (ah) zaem (ah-) ok (ah) hanh (lo -) namh (ah) fok (ah) gva - baenz (ah-) gaen (laen)

haen (ah) mbaeuq (ah) ndaex (ah) mbauq (ah-) hek (ah) (ngoenz ah nix ah lae ae)

gwq ndiei nuengx mbaeuq cam time normal sister Neg to ask	Normally, I wouldn't ask
haet nix nangz hwnj daeuj morning this sister to move upward to come	This morning I came up this way
daengz ⁸⁴ zaeuj doh ndiai loi to arrive head all nothing to comb	(I) arrived (and) none of my head was combed
daengz naj doh ndiai siaiq to arrive face all nothing to wash	(I) arrived (and) none of my face was washed
nuengx gvaeh bo daeb bo sister to walk mountain to pile mountain	I walked (across) mountains upon mountains
nangz gvaeh baq daeb baq sister to walk hill to pile hill	I walked (across) hill piled on hills
zaij gva laj aem?nu? to walk to pass under (a large, thorny plant)	(I) walked under large thorny plants
du cih dwg lumz giengq we exactly to be to forget mirror	We have forgotten our mirror
lumz aen giengq gaeu? ngo? to forget CL mirror to look at	(We) forgot to look in the mirror
[bw]? miz loi loi zaeuj to have comb to comb head	(likely: I don't) have a comb to comb my head
nuengx daeuj gaohnix hoen sister to come this kind road	I have come through this kind of road
zaij daengz zaem okhanh to walk to arrive hair to sweat	(I) have walked to the point that my hair sweats
namhfok gva baenz gaen dust to pass to achieve half-kilogram	The dust (in my hair) weighs more than a half-kilogram
haen mbaeuq ndaex mbauq hek to meet Neg to obtain male guest	(I) will meet, but won't be able to have a boyfriend

⁸⁴ Here, *daengz* could also be translated as “to the point of.” This would result in the translation “(I have traveled) to the point of my head becoming unkempt.”

Male Strophe 2

(yi) bak (ah-) gvai (ah - ae -) gvai (ah) nuengx (ah -) (na - laen)

(yi) nuengx (ah-) cam (ah) goq - (ae - de ah) aeu (ah) loi (laen)

3
 nangz (ah) cam (ah-) gvan (ah-) acu (ah) gie-ngq (lw-) a - (ah) acu (ah) mbaeuq - naeuz (ah-) loemh (yi-) (na - laen)

3
 (yi) mbaeuq (ah -) naeuz (ah) go - nq (ae - de) (ah) haemh (ah-) lienz (laen)

(yi) gvai (ah) nuengx (ah - ae -) ngoenz (ah) nix (ah) baenz (ah-) (lw - de) doi (ah-) fien (laen)

gvan (ah) bac (ah-) laez (ah) ndaex (ah) vang (ah) (nacuz ah so - mc-ngz ac)

bak gvai gvai nuengx
 mouth clever clever sister

Sister's mouth is clever

nuengx cam goq aeu ndoi
 sister to ask brother to take up comb

Sister asks me for a comb

nangz cam gvan aeu giengq
 sister to ask husband to take up mirror

Sister asks me for a mirror

a aeu mbaeuq naeuz loemh
 to want to take up Neg to announce early

(You) want (the comb), but didn't say it earlier

mbaeuq naeuz gonq haemh lienz
 Neg announce before night yesterday

(You) didn't tell (me) before last night

ngoenz nix baenz doiq fien
 day this to achieve antiphonal fien

Today, (I) just want to sing antiphonal songs

gvan bae laez ndaex vang
 husband to go where to obtain time

Where can I go to get more time?

Women Strophe 3

(yi) gwq - ndici (ah) nuengx (ah-) (ah - de) (ah) mbaeuq (ah-) cam (laen)

miz song (ah-) sau (ah-) daeuj (ah) lix (ah-) (lw -) lai (ah) hoj (ah-) giq - daeuj (ah-) liengz (laen)

bux de (ah) bwn (ah) da (ah) haemz (ah-) mit (ah) daeq - (lw-) bak (ah) maeq - (ah) lumj (ah-) gvuenh (ah-) yaemx (laen)

ngoenz ngoenz (ah-) naem (ah) loi (ah) zaeuj (ah-) (le ah) ngoenz (ah) ngoenz (ah-) mbaeuq (ah-) loi (ah) gie - ngq (na laen)

(yi) goq (ah) giengq (ah -) a (gi ah - de) (ah) gueg (ah -) doengz (laen)

loi (ah) zaem (ah) a (ah) liuh (ah) mbaeuq - (ngoenz ah nix ah - lae - ae)

gwqndiei nuengx mbaeuq cam Normally, I would not ask
 normally sister Neg to ask

miz song sau daeuj lix (I) have two women (who) came with (me)
 to have two woman to come with

lai hojgiq daeuj liengz Many friends have followed (us)
 many friend to come to follow

bux de bwnda haemz mit daeq Their eyebrows (are like) sharp shaving knives
 person that eyebrow sharp knife to shave

bak maeq lumj gvuenhyaemx (Their) mouths (are) pink, like Gvuenhyaemx's
 mouth pink to be like Buddhist goddess of mercy

ngoenz ngoenz naem loi zaeuj Every day, (I) want to comb (my) head
 day day to think to comb head

ngoenz ngoenz mbaeuq⁸⁵ goq giengq Every day, (I) am unable to look in the mirror
 day day Neg to look mirror

goq giengq a gueg doengz I want to look in the mirror so I can find a friend
 to look mirror to want to do close friend

⁸⁵ In the recording, it appears that there are two different words sung. *Mbaeuq* (not) is definitely audible, but it is also possible that *naem* (to think) is repeated by the other singer.

loi zaem a liuh mbauq
to comb hair to want to play man

I want to comb my hair so I can find a boyfriend

Men Strophe 3

(yi) sau (ah-) ndi (ah - ae -) gvai (ah) nuengx (ah) (na - laen)

(yi) nuengx (ah-) cam (ah) goq - (ae - de ah) aeu (ah) loi (laen)

nanxz (ah) cam (ah-) gvan (ah-) aeu (ah) giengq (lw-) haej (ah) goq - naeuz (ah) haej (ah-) nuengx (ah-) (na laen)

(yi) haej (ah) goq - (ah-) naeuz (ah-) (lo - de) haej (ah-) nanxz (laen)

(yi) bi (ah-) nix - mbwn (ah) (lo - de) lengx (ah) sang (laen)

saem (ah) gvan (ah) cit (ah-) baenz (ah) miq - (lw-) hiq - haeux (ah) mbaeuq (ah) doh (ah-) gwn (laen)

ciengx (ah) mu (ah) goq - dai (ah) ngoenh (lo - ah) cenz (ah) cwax (ah) giengq (ah) mbaeuq - miz (laen)

doiq (ah) mbaeuq (ah) gva - mengz (ah) nuengx (ah-) (lw) dioq - mbaeuq (ah) gva - mengz (ah) nanxz (laen)

haej (ah) nanxz (ah-) cam (ah) lau - (ah-) baeg - (ah) (gah laix ah - lac - ac)

saundi gvai nuengx
pretty clever sister

Sister is clever and pretty

nuengx cam goq aeu loi
sister to ask brother to take up comb

Sister is asking brother to give (her) a comb

nanxz cam gvan aeu giengq
sister to ask husband to take up mirror

Sister is asking me to give (her) a mirror

haej goq naeuz haej nuengx
to give brother to announce to give sister

Let me give sister an answer

haej goq naeuz haej nangz
to give brother to announce to give sister

Let brother give an answer to sister

bi nix mbwn lengx sang
year this sky dry high

This year, there has been a drought

saem gvang cit baenz miq
heart husband bland to achieve vinegar

My heart is as bland as vinegar

hiq haeux mbaeuq doh gwn
to worry rice Neg enough to eat

(I) am worried the rice is not enough to eat

ciengx mu goq dai ngoenh
to raise pig brother to die to be sick (for animal)

The pigs I have raised have died of disease

cenz cwax giengq mbaeuq miz
money to buy mirror Neg to have

(I) don't have money to buy a mirror

doiq mbaeuq gva mengz nuengx
I'm sorry you sister

I apologize to sister

doiq mbaeuq gva mengz nangz
I'm sorry you sister

I apologize to you

haej nangz cam laubaeg
to give sister to ask no reason

(I) let sister ask for no reason

Women Strophe 4

(yi) sau (ah-) ndi (ah - ac -) ngoenz (ah-) nix (oh-) (na laen)

(yi) gwq - ndiei (ah) nuengx (ah-) (ah - dc) (ah) mbaeuq (ah-) cam (laen)

miz song (ah-) sau (ah-) daeuj (ah) lix (ah) (lw -) miz (ah) hoj - giq - daeuj (ah-) liengz (laen)

(yi) de (ah -) baenz (ah) yieng (ah-) (lw - de) gva (ah) du (laen)

hunz Hwcu (ah) cu (ah-) bak (ah) lai - (lo-) lwg (ah) haej - de (ah) yaiq (ah-) din (laen)

gim (ah) mbaeuq (ah-) miz (ah) doh (ah) ciao - bac (ah) yaemz (ah - lac - ac)

saundi ngoenz nix
beautiful day this

Today is a beautiful day

gwqndiei nuengx mbaeuq cam
normally sister Neg to ask

Normally, I wouldn't ask

miz song sau daeuj lix
to have two woman to come with

(I) have two women (who) came with (me)

miz hojgiq daeuj liengz
to have friend to come to follow

(I) have friends who came and followed

de baenz yieng gva du
they to achieve beauty to pass us

They are more beautiful than us

hunz Hwcu bak lai
person (a hamlet in Tiandong County) mouth many

The people of Hwcu (like to) gossip

laeg haej de yaiq din
don't to give them to waste step

Don't let them waste (their) steps

gim mbaeuq miz doh ciao bae yaemz
money Neg to have all borrow to go fast

(Although) you don't have gold, (we'll)
borrow all (you have) and go fast⁸⁶

⁸⁶ It may also be possible to read this as "There is no gold, can you go to borrow some quickly?"

Men Strophe 4

(yi) sau (ah-) ndi (ah - ac -) gvai (ah) nuengx (ah-) (na - laen)

(yi) mbwg (ah) nix (ah) mbwg (ah-) giaz laez (ah-) (lo - de) yak (ah-) haq (laen)

lanz (ah) nix (ah-) lanz (ah) giaz (ah-) laez (ah-) haq (ha-) (lw-) cam (ah) goq - (ah-) aeu (ah-) loi (ah) doh - (ah) aeu (ah) gie-ngq (ah-) (na laen)

(yi) cah (ah) nuengx (ah) dwg (ah) (oh - de) (ah) gaem (ah-) haeux (laen)

(yi) deq (ah-) ngoenz (ah) cog (ah-) (lw - de) (ah) ngoenz (ah-) lwz (laen)

(yi) ngoenz (ah-) cog (ah) dwg (ah-) (lw - de) (ah) ngoenz (ah) hw (laen)

deq (ah) coh (ah-) dwz (ah-) ok (ah) baih - lo - g goq - coh gva (ah) bae (ah-) cam (laen)

nangz (ah) ndaex (ah) deq - lox mbaeuq - (lw-) ci? - (ah) ndaex (ah) deq (ah) ci? (ah-) miz (laen)

(yi) ca? (ah) nuengx (ah-) ndenj (ah) (lw - de) (ah) bae (ah-) gvan (laen)

cam (ah) bix (ah-) nangz (ah) loi (ah) go - nq (naeuz ah ndi ah - lac - ac)

saundi gvai nuengx
beautiful clever sister

Sister is beautiful and clever

mbwg nix mbwg giaz laez yak haq
child this child where to want to marry

Child, where are you going to get married

lan nix lan giaz laez haq
grandchild this grandchild where to marry

Grandchild, where are you getting married

cam goq aeu loi doh aeu giengq
to ask brother to take up comb also to take up mirror

(You) ask brother for a mirror and comb

cah nuengx dwg gaem haeux
if sister to be to grasp rice

Seeing that sister is grasping for rice

deq ngoenz cog ngoenz lwz
to wait tomorrow day after tomorrow

(You should) wait till tomorrow (or) the day after

ngoencog dwg ngoenzhw
tomorrow to be market day

Tomorrow is a market day

deq coh dwz ok bailoeg
to wait until to take to move outward outside

(If you) wait until then, (they) will put (it) outside

goq coh gvaqbae cam
brother until to go over to ask

Brother will go over and ask then

nangz ndaex deq lox mbaeuq
sister to obtain to wait to know Neg

Can sister wait or not?

ci? ndaex deq ci? miz
then to obtain to wait then to have

If (you) are able to (wait), then (you) will have

ca? nuengx ndenj bae gvan
if sister hurry to go husband

Seeing that sister is in a hurry to get married

cam binangz loi gonq
to ask sister in law comb before

(You should) have asked sister in law for a comb

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