



**YUNNAN REVEALED:  
*INDIGENOUS MUSIC AND DANCE FROM CHINA'S LAND OF CLOUDS***

**DEEPER BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

**YUNNAN PROVINCE**

A frontier province in the southwest of China, Yunnan Province borders Guizhou Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in the east, Sichuan Province in the north, Tibetan Autonomous Region in the northwest, Myanmar in the west and Laos and Vietnam in the south. Geographically, Yunnan is connected to the rest of the Asian Continent in the north and faces the Southeast Asian Peninsula between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean in the south. Because of its location, Yunnan is affected by both the Southeast and Southwest monsoons as well as weather conditions from the Tibetan Plateau. As a result, Yunnan has a very diverse climate.

Yunnan is the 8th largest Chinese province. Approximately 84% is rugged mountain, 10% highland and hills and 6% lowland and valleys. Yunnan province's average elevation measures about 6560 feet, while the region's highest peaks reach 22,113 feet in stark contrast with its lowest elevation of 251 feet. Yunnan Province is comprised of 127 counties and 17 prefectures and cities that include eight ethnic minority Autonomous Prefectures: Chuxiong Yi, Honghe Hani and Yi, Wenshan Zhuang and Miao, Xishuangbanna Dai; Dali Baizu; Dehong Dai and Jingpo; Nujiang Lisu; Diqing Tibetan. Eight of Yunnan's prefectures and twenty-seven of its counties border China's neighboring countries.

Yunnan is one of the most culturally diverse places in the world, with twenty-five diverse ethnic groups. The geographical diversity of the region has enabled the development of the distinct life-styles, customs, religious beliefs, ideological constructs and social structures of Yunnan province's different ethnic groups. Each group also has its own colorful costumes, crafts, dances, music and songs. Presently, Yunnan, with its extraordinary culture and biodiversity, faces enormous challenges. It is currently coming under pressure from economic and tourism development, and is concurrently impacted by the movements and changes toward globalization occurring in the Mekong region at large, as it is the gateway to China for the rest of Southeast Asia. These crossroads of change are uprooting Yunnan's social and economic structures and posing great challenges to the survival and preservation of the cultural heritages of the many ethnic minorities in the Province.

**MINORITY NATIONALITIES**

China is a multi-ethnic country, with more than 8%, or 100 million people, constituting the 56 ethnic groups officially recognized by the People's Republic of China. Tonight's program features four of these minority nationalities.

**Dai Nationality**

The Dai historical records can be traced back to 1 B.C. The Dai were called Dianyue, Dan, Shan, Liao and Jiuliaoin during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), and the areas in which they lived were called the "elephant riding country." In the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the Dai were called Baiyi. The name "Dai" means "peace and freedom loving." With a population over one million people throughout Yunnan Province, the Dai are concentrated in Xishuangbanna Prefecture, Lincang Prefecture, Dehong Prefecture and the reaches of the Lancang-Mekong River and Honghe (Red River). There are three branches of Dais in Yunnan: the Han Dai (Land Dai), the Shui Dai (Water Dai) and the Huayao Dai (Decorated Waist Dai). Many Dai also live in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar.

The religion of the Dai, Hinayana (Theravada), was introduced into the Dai region more than a thousand years ago. The Dai also take part in animistic worship by offering sacrifices to spirits and ancestors. In the past, the Dai people had no schools; entering the priesthood was therefore the only opportunity for education. Temples and pagodas are

seen in every village. Huayao Dai are an exception among the Dai nationality, as they believe in animism but not Buddhism. The Dai people worship water and regard water as the symbol of beauty, purity and happiness. The Dai's New Year is celebrated by the Water Splashing Festival, which lasts three or four days in mid-April. In the first two days, dragon-boat races are held to send away the old year; on the last day, activities to bring luck are held to welcome the New Year. The Dai language belongs to the Zhuang-Dai branch of the Zhuang-Dong group of the Sino-Tibetan language family, a group of related languages that includes Thai, Lao, Shui, Buyi, Dong and Zhuang. Traditionally, Dai people have four forms of written language, but now they use only the standardized characters of the Xishuangbanna and Dehong scripts. Historically, Dai people used palm leaves to record and pass down their cultures. It is said that they have 84,000 volumes of Buddhist scriptures on the talipot palm "paper," the contents of which include classical works of Buddhism, medical theories, literature and arts.

The Dai ethnic group may have been the first in the area to plant rice and to use a furrow to plough. The Dai, who live in a subtropical climate zone with abundant rainfall and fertile land, produce rice, sugar, tea, hemp and fruits. They live in bamboo houses on stilts with courtyards enclosed by bamboo hedges and fruit trees. The regions where the Dai people live also feature rare plants, herbs, elephants and peacocks. These beautiful tropical surroundings have fostered the Dai people's love of singing and dancing. *Hulusi*, a gourd flute which produces a hauntingly beautiful sound, is the main Dai musical instrument. Today, Dai mountain villages on the Lancang-Mekong river route with four national ports are considered by the Chinese government to be one of the most important channels between Yunnan and Southeast Asia. The unique traditional culture of the Dai communities and the ecology of the region are major attractions drawing large numbers of tourists from China and abroad.

### **Naxi Nationality**

The Naxi, with a population of 300,000 people, are a Tibeto-Burman people, concentrated in northwestern Yunnan—especially in Lijiang County—with a few outlying communities in neighboring parts of Sichuan and Tibet. Their language belongs to the Yi family of Tibeto-Burman, though the eastern dialect (spoken by about 40,000 people who identify themselves as Moso, Na or Naze) also has strong affiliations with the Qiangic family. Both branches of the Naxi are thought to have migrated to their present locales about 2,000 years ago from somewhere in the area of northwest Sichuan, southern Gansu or eastern Qinghai. Along with the Yi and many other Tibeto-Burman groups in the southwest, they are believed to be descendants of the ancient Qiang peoples.

During the 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Naxi were an important component of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms, which ruled over much of southwest China and contended with Tibet and the Chinese Tang and Song dynasties for regional control. They were conquered by Khubilai at the founding of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1260-1368), and during the Ming and early Qing dynasties (1368-1644 and 1644-1911) they were ruled by a native chief (*tusi*), established by the Chinese court. The Naxi *tusi* family (surnamed Mu [wood]) was one of the most powerful in all of southwest China, and their domain encompassed all of northwest Yunnan and projected deep into southwest Sichuan as well. Great patrons of Tibetan and Chinese religions and other high arts, the Mu kings earned Naxi the distinction (in Tibetan and Chinese, as well as their own eyes) of being one of the most civilized of Yunnan's many minority ethnic groups. Although tourism is now the region's biggest business, the Naxi were traditionally farmers and herders, and engaged in the long-distance yak and mule caravan trade between Yunnan and Tibet. Many of their folk arts—especially singing—reflect their pastoral and agricultural lifestyle.

The Naxi are best known for two unusual cultural features. The (western) Naxi have a ritual specialist called a *dongba*, who chants and dances his elaborate rituals using texts written in a unique pictographic script. It is the only script of its kind in use in the world today. The (eastern) Moso/Naze are famous for a kind of "marriage" custom in which men visit their girlfriends by night, return to their natal households during the day, and any resulting children are raised in their mother's home. This kind of relationship (for it is not properly a marriage) promotes a relatively high degree of gender equity in Moso society, for both man and woman are free to break it off at any time, and to maintain multiple relationships simultaneously. Once thought to be an extremely primitive form of marriage, it is in some respects quite similar to many modern, urban family traditions.

### **Wa Nationality**

The Wa people call themselves Wa, Lei Wa, Ba Rao, Bu Rao, etc. According to historical records, the Wa people are the descendants of the Baipu people, who lived before the Qin period (221 BC- 26 BC). Wa people were called Wangman, Wangqiezi, and Wangwaiyu during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), Gula in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Ha Wa and Ka Wa in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Upon the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), they were formally named Wa. The Wa people have a unique spoken language belonging to the Austro-Asiatic Mon Khmer language family from the south of China. Genetically, however, the Wa are thought to be the descendants of Pue'kh tribes that migrated from the lower Yangzi north of Yunnan. Wa people did not have a written language. Instead, they kept records and accounts or passed messages to each other using material objects or by engraving bamboo strips.

Message-transferring using objects such as sugarcane, bananas and salt could signify friendship, chili meant anger, and cock feathers denoted urgency. In 1957, an alphabetic script was created.

The Wa people in Yunnan are concentrated in the Cangyuan and Ximeng Wa Autonomous Counties between the Mekong and Salween Rivers, in the southwest corner of Yunnan on the border of Myanmar, surrounded by mountainous ridges some 2,000 meters above sea level. The area inhabited by the Wa has a mild climate with abundant rainfall and fertile land. The total population of Wa is 500,000. More than 360,000 Wa live in Yunnan, 100,000 in Myanmar and 20,000 in Thailand. Wa live in two-storied bamboo structures built on mountain slopes.

In the past, the Wa people worshipped nature. They believed that all mountains, rivers and other natural phenomena represented deities. Today, some Wa people have become followers of Christianity and others of Buddhism. The Wa people are hospitable and warm to their guests. They entertain guests in their homes with wine in bamboo cups as a token of respect and welcome.

### **Yi Nationality**

The Yi people are widely distributed throughout southwest China, including Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou provinces and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam and Myanmar. With a population of more than eight million people, the Yi nationality is one of the largest ethnic minorities of China. The principal concentration of Yi—five million people—live in Yunnan, making it the province's largest ethnic group. Most of the Yi population live in Honghe Hani/Yi Autonomous Prefecture around the Red River north of the China and Vietnam border, and between Dianchi Lake outside of Kunming and Erhai Lake in Dali. The history of the Yi people spans centuries. The ancestors of the Yi ethnic group can be traced back to the Qiang people; once a strong and populous ethnic group whose history is traced to the Shang Dynasty (1600 BC-1046 BC) in northwest China. The Yi people then migrated south, joined and mixed with the indigenous people of China's southwest, and created the Yi ethnic group. Yi people also established several famous ancient kingdoms, including Ailao Kingdom, Dian Kingdom over two thousand years ago and Nanzhao Kingdom (738-902). There are more than 50 subgroups within the Yi nationality. They call themselves Nuosu, Nisu, Nasu, Sani, Azhe, Lalu, Luoluo, etc. The name Yi was bestowed by the Chinese government in the 1950s.

The Yi people have their own language, which belongs to the Yi Group of the Tibeto-Burman Branch of Sino-Tibetan Language Family. Yi characters, one of the earliest syllabic scripts in China, were formed in the 13th century. There's also a modern standardized writing system; both are used today. The Yi people have their own animistic religion, worshipping natural and ancestral gods. The clothing of the Yi and their personal adornments are colorful. Music and dance are an important part of Yi people's lives; they often greet people with songs, courtship is often expressed by singing and dancing and men at social gatherings invariably play a three-stringed fiddle with a handle about one meter long and a large sound box about a foot in diameter, called the Moon Guitar. There are a great many Yi costumes with unique designs stemming from various places. Yi people have many traditional festivals. The most important ones are the Torch Festival and the October New Year.

### **Q & A WITH THE ARTISTS**

*Researched and compiled by Alice Leng, China Yunnan Cultural Exchange Center; Lan-Lan Wang, Margaret Lawrence and Arnie Malina*

#### **DOES YOUR NAME HAVE ANY PARTICULAR MEANING?**

*He Jinhua (Naxi):* My name is He Jinhua, in hopes that I would be as precious as the Golden Flower.

*Li Xiuxiang (Naxi):* A life of elegance and beauty.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi):* Yu is the word which designates my generation, meaning that everyone in my generation in the family would have Yu in their name.

*A Jiawen (Yi):* My name is according to the generational assignment of names.

*Cha Yongying (Yi):* According to legend, my ancestors moved to another place to hide for some reason, maybe environmental. They moved to what is now my hometown. When they arrived, the mountain was covered with camellia (*Cha*, tea) flowers, and they found the place to be beautiful, so they chose to stay there. That is where the surname Cha (tea, camellia) comes from.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi):* My parents said I was the treasure (*bao*) of the Hou family. The name means that I will succeed in everything I do.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi):* My surname is Luo. My father's generation used the character Guo, our generation uses Feng and the next generation uses Zhen; so I use the word Feng, as passed down from the last generation.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: My parents raised three children and I was the only daughter. I loved our Huayao Yi music from a young age. My parents hoped that I would cherish (*zhen*) and spread (*fa*) our ethnic culture.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: My name is Pu Meifang, and my nickname is Jiuying. I was born in the ninth (*Jiu*) month, so my grandmother named me Jiuying.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: Yan is a Wa term of respect, like boss or big man. Bing means a great singer and dancer.

#### HOW DO YOU EARN YOUR LIVING?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: I am a musician.

*He Jinhua (Naxi)*: Singing and performing folk music.

*Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: I am a folk artist.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: I study Dongba culture and traditions at the Dongba Culture Institute in Lijiang.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: A life of farming.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: I work at the family farm, do embroidery and I can sing and dance.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: Performing ethnic dance and doing farm work.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: Working day labor and performing music.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: I mostly do farm work. I usually do a bit of field work and pass on ethnic and folk culture on the side (mostly sewing and embroidering ethnic clothing).

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: I am a farmer.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: By passing on and performing folk and ethnic cultural arts.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: Working to save, inherit, preserve, pass on and carry on the wonderful ethnic traditional cultural arts.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: I live off my pension.

#### IS YOUR TRADITIONAL SONG/DANCE/MUSIC PERFORMED BY MEN, WOMEN OR BOTH?

##### IS IT PERFORMED BY PEOPLE OF PARTICULAR AGES?

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: My Dongba dances can only be danced by men. There are others in which men and women can participate.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: The four-string moon guitar is mostly played by men, though there are a few women.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: For carnivals, the Torch Festival, Spring Festival, New Year's, holidays and weddings, men and women, young and old can all dance. For funerals and offerings, old people dance and the young children can dance with them.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: Our country stop is for men and women of all ages.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: Men and women of all ages can perform the music of our Huayao Yi people.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: There are mountain songs, romantic duets and weeping at the wedding. Among those, the mountain songs can be sung by men and women of any age. The romantic songs are sung together by one man and one woman or many men and women, also of any age. Weeping at the wedding is only sung by the bride's mother. As for dances, there is the tobacco box dance, the spirit drum and the stomp. The tobacco box dance is performed by multiple people, both men and women. Only young women are allowed to dance the spirit drum. The stomp is also danced by multiple men and women. The instruments are the reed flute, tobacco box, leaf harp and spirit drum. The reed flute, tobacco box and leaf harp are played by multiple men and women, but the spirit drum is only played by women.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: These dances can be performed by both men and women, but it is more interesting when men and women perform together. It brings out more of what's special in our ethnic cultural arts. There is no age requirement for these dances, but each age group performs with different characteristics and different skill levels.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: Men and women of any age can participate. All are brothers and sisters in revelry.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: These songs are usually performed by men, but can be performed by men and women together. You must be over 50 years old.

#### WHEN AND WHERE IS IT PERFORMED?

*He Jinhua and Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: These can be performed on stage or as a part of daily life.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: Dongba dances are danced as a part of Dongba rituals, and take place in homes and villages. Other dances are danced during holidays and festivals.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: I can play melodies for folk performances, or just play by myself.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: The country stomp is usually danced at night for festivals, but sometimes during the day and night.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: These songs and dances are performed at weddings and funerals.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: Our country stomp is danced during the Yi Torch Festival, Spring Festival and events such as weddings. Men and women, young and old, dance in frenzy, sometimes for three days and nights. Everyone dances in the village workshop; the children learn from their elders. This is how it has always been passed on.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: We mostly perform on New Year's and festivals. We usually perform in public places.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: These are performed for New Year's, festivals, parties and rituals. There is no limitation on the performance facilities.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: These performances came from the places boys and girls flirted. Nowadays, they can now be carried out in any setting.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: They are usually held during weddings, festivals, project dedications or when men and women get together like old times. The venue can be a playground, workshop, indoors, outdoors, in a mountain forest or a grassy field—any of these are fine.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: These are performed for ceremonies, big holidays and harvests.

#### WHAT DO THE LYRICS MEAN?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: When the moon rises, young men express their emotions to the people in their hearts.

*He Jinhua (Naxi)*: The song of marrying the daughter: A golden flower must leave the other flowers; the mother who raised her cries like the rain.

*Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: There is a song for every mountain.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: The words are from Dongba (ritual) scriptures.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: Some of the melodies I play are accompanied by lyrics, some aren't.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: Most of the lyrics are about love, and some are tragic, or express longing for someone.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: The lyrics are about hardship in the fields and devoted love between young men and women. The movements imitate those of animals.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: There are three main types of lyrics. The first is about romance, the second is tragedy and the third is about happiness. The romance songs are call and response from man to woman. In tragedies, he/she sings all of his/her sadness out on the stomping grounds, and he/she will feel a bit better. The lyrics follow what you are singing about.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: The lyrics are mostly about blessings, prayers and celebrations.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: Most of the lyrics are courting conversations between boys and girls.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: There are songs of praise and songs of humility. Some are verses and others are conversations. The setting is an important factor as well, as there are meeting songs, encounter songs, fun songs, hot songs, songs across ravines, etc. When it comes to the Great Melodies of southern Yunnan, you have to spend some serious time and energy.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: The lyrics are about Sigangli's wood drum culture: according to the origin story, at the beginning of the universe, heaven and earth, man and wife had not yet split, and the animals and plants were unable to grow. With the help of the female ancestor, Anmuling, and the efforts of the rooster, the immortal rooster was used to claw at the golden chains binding heaven and earth. Heaven and earth split apart, making room for the existence of animals, plants and mankind.

EXPLAIN YOUR INSTRUMENT (WHAT IS IT CALLED? WHAT IT IS MADE FROM? WHO MADE IT?)

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: Gourd Flute (*Hulu Sheng*) made from bamboo and gourd. I made it myself.

*Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: My mouth harp is made of bamboo. I bought it.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: I use a bell drum made of copper for the Dongba dance, as passed down from the ancestors. I also use a drum made from goat skin. There is also a large drum made from cow skin.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: The instrument I use is called the Yi four-string guitar (or moon guitar). It is made of the Chinese toon tree, the Yuhao tree and briars. I made eighty percent of the moon guitars in our county by hand.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: The musical instruments of the country stomp, the bamboo flute, gourd pipe, three-string guitar and the leaf harp are mostly played by men. The flute is made of bamboo, the gourd pipe is made from a gourd, bamboo and wax, the guitar is made from wood and guitar strings.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: I play the three- and four-string guitars. They were made by A Jiawen.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: My reed flute was made by an old man in the village. The youth cannot make these anymore. It is made of bamboo. There are other ethnic instruments that my teachers made. I can play 15 different instruments and I have 8 teachers. These teachers are all from different ethnic groups, and the different instruments are made by different teachers. They are made from bamboo shafts, gourds and split bamboo.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: For instruments we have the reed flute, tobacco box, spirit drum and leaf harp. The spirit drum is made from the best mountain wood, which the dragon head leads the villagers to.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: We use moon guitars and tobacco boxes, mostly made of bamboo and the wood of a tree called the toon.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: My instrument, the *si-xuan* (four-string guitar, moon guitar) is usually made of *chun* (Chinese toon). This was made by A Jiawen.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: My instrument is called *bai* and is made from the king of bamboo, which we call *Heilong*, deep in the primeval forests of Washan. I made it according to ancient Wa instrument traditions.

EXPLAIN YOUR COSTUME (WHO MADE IT? DO THE MATERIALS HAVE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCES OR SYMBOLISMS?)

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: I designed them myself, using cotton. They adhere to tradition.

*He Jinhua (Naxi)*: I wear the traditional women's costume of the Western Naxi.

*Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: I wear the traditional women's clothing of the Central Naxi.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: I wear paintings of five great spirits on my hat, prayer beads around my neck and a long robe on my body. The clothes are woven in the ethnic style.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: The costume I wear is the everyday clothing of my people. The fabric is whatever is popular on the market at the time. Colors are coordinated according to the traditional way.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: I made it myself. We girls embroider by hand, sew the clothes and hats. We also weave the material.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: My wife made my costume out of black and white hand woven cloth.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: My mother made my costume. The goat skin was made by an old man in the village. There are very few people who can cure it in the village, so the old people make the goatskins. Nowadays we buy our cloth in the townships.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: I made all of the clothes I wear myself with a needle and thread. These costumes are mostly red, because the cherry blossom is red, and that is the flower that the Huayao revere the most.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: Our ethnic costumes are made from our own hand-woven fabric and embroidered by ourselves. They symbolize our gods, history and culture.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: I make my own costumes and the materials and colors bring out the Yi girls' love of flowers and beauty, and it also shows that Yi girls are born with nimble hands.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: My wife makes my costumes, usually with cotton. They are clothes that were common in the 1950s.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: I design the clothes and my wife, Ye Ga, sews them. They must be made of traditional threads and fibers from the primeval forest. In Wa, this is called "clothing for communion with heaven" and is for communicating with the universe and the earth's myriad things. The symbolism is of nature worship.

#### HAS THIS PERFORMANCE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: The performing methods have changed, but the ethnic content has not.

*He Jinhua and Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: The authentic stuff cannot be changed.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: There are records of the Dongba dances, but the traditions are passed orally from generation to generation. Though there are changes over time, the changes are not very large.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: Most of the guitar melodies are for ethnic folk music, though sometimes there are four-string guitars with electric backup.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: These usually do not change. Some of the traditions were changed when brought on stage, but those must only be requirements of the stage. The character cannot change.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: With all of the changes of the ages, these performances seem even more like classics.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: These performances do not usually change. Sometimes on stage, the shape changes a bit, but this is necessary for the stage. The true traditional character is left unchanged.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: Our performances have changed a bit over time. They used to be a bit restricted, but now they are more open.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: This is Yi tradition. It was passed down from the ancestors and it cannot be changed.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: With the changing of the times, these performances have also seen many changes and innovations, but on the foundation of the original, ten thousand changes cannot remove it from its origins.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: For an artist with a relatively strong grasp and depth of understanding of traditional culture, change does not come easy; but for someone who just learns superficially and does not take it to heart, there will be changes.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: These performances have not changed over the ages.

#### WHAT IS THE MOST CHALLENGING THING TO LEARN IN YOUR PERFORMANCE TRADITION?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: The ethnic and folk feel and cultural content is most difficult.

*He Jinhua and Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: The hardest part is learning to sing the melodies.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: The Tiger, Lion and Hawk dances are the hardest of the Dongba dances. In singing, the hardest part is learning the different voices for different occasions.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: The most important thing in learning the moon guitar is to put your heart into it. If you love it and study hard, you don't necessarily have to understand music theory and musical scores.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: Actually, I like this traditional music both as a hobby and a tradition. When I learn them, I put everything into entering this realm, so I find it all easy to learn.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: The hardest song is the *Sea Grass Melody*. The hardest dances are the animal dances.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: I have loved these traditional songs since I was a child. I always liked to sing them while I was walking or doing things. Whenever I have free time, I sing and dance. I don't find that to be difficult at all.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: For the Huayao, the hardest to learn are those songs where the chorus, clapping and dance steps are different beats (sing four-step and clap a two, or dance a four-step and clap a three).

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: The hardest thing to learn is how to properly present what one's heart wants to express and dance.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: Among this traditional music, the most difficult to learn is the *Sea Grass Melody*, of the four great melodies of southern Yunnan. Few people can learn it well.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: For traditional dance, it is the three-step guitar. Since it is in the tobacco box dance, it is called the female guitar. Long ago the people often said: "Old hands and new beginners come to the mountain field and play the three-step guitar." If you can't play the three-step, you can't dance the tobacco box dance. Among the many dances emulating animals, the hardest is "jade frog pouring water." The most complicated singing melody is the *Sea Grass Melody*.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: Among these traditional songs, the most difficult is that which is performed on the peak of Gongming Mountain, which requires harmony between dance movements and instrumental rhythm.

#### WHAT MAKES A PERFORMER OF THIS TRADITION “GOOD”?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: Many varied performing methods.

*He Jinhua and Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: You have to be able to perform at any time and bring out what’s in your heart.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: The Dongba dance is a dance of the spirits. You must first understand the spirits before you can dance them.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: The performer must understand the meaning of the songs and must have a grasp of guitar techniques.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: In duets and call-and-response, you have to be able to use your voice and the rhythms to express the emotions and love in the lyrics. It is the same with dance. I can express my love through movements.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: The performer has to see the plot as his own personal story to truly present the traditional meaning.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: When singing ethnic music, singing duets, these lyrics are expressions of love; I express my love, and my partner does the same.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: The performer must put their whole body and heart into the performance.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: The performer, after painstaking learning from his elders, must himself grasp the essence in order to be able to bring out the meaning of the performance.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: The performer must wear more natural and primitive clothing to bring out the feel of the ethnic group.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: When performing a dance, one must get into character and all moves must be right. You must be naturally open, a combination of softness and strength. All of your external movements must be light and lively, like the dance of a bird. On the inside, you must be calm and collected like in tai-chi. The hands and the heart must be together, and the legs and the mind must move as one. You use all of your body’s strength; the entire body must be fully relaxed and unhindered, but the frame cannot be loosened. In dance, the rhythm is highly dynamic and the moves are clean and steady; force is balanced between softness and strength, and the feeling can be both relaxed and tight. When performing, you must have the proper musicians to accompany you, and the tones and moods must be clear. In happiness and in mourning, you must put yourself into the feeling.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: The performer must be holy, serious, brave, lively and happy.

#### FROM WHOM DID YOU LEARN THIS TRADITION?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: I learned these traditions from Dai folk artists in Dehong Prefecture.

*He Jinhua (Naxi)*: I learned from other local folk artists.

*Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: I learned from my parents and from local folk artists.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: I learned these dances from a Dongba elder in my village.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: I participated in folk music events beginning at an early age, and I learned from my elders.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: I learned those of my own people by the time I was seven or eight. I learned some others at Tian Feng’s Institute. In addition, the Yunnan Government really cares about ethnic culture, and has us exchange with other ethnic groups in hopes that our traditional culture will be passed on and everyone will come to recognize my ethnic culture.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: I learned in my hometown under the artists Li Fazhong, Zhao Xingcheng and Mo Qiongying.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: I first joined in on the country stomp at the age of six or seven, when I began learning from the older people. There are also some songs and dances of other peoples, which I learned at Tian Feng’s Yunnan Institute for the Preservation of Ethnic Culture.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: I learned these traditions from the elder folk artisans of our people.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: I learned from my mother.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: I learned some as a child through the influence of my environment, and some from the teachers at the Yunnan Institute for the Preservation of Ethnic Culture. There are also some that I created myself.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: I learned from the older generation in my village.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: I began learning these traditions at the age of five or six from my father, Yan, and my elder brother, Sui Ga.

WHAT ABOUT THE WAY YOU PERFORM THIS IS DIFFERENT FROM ANYONE ELSE?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: My rhythms are varied, but within one breath, they are soft and moving.

*He Jinhua (Naxi)*: I have my own style.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: The Dongba dance is a religious dance. It is holy, so it is very different from other dances.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: There isn't much difference between what I play and other traditional music, except that I play better than others, and my rhythms are more distinct.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: Among our ethnic group, the performances are all pretty much the same. They are very different among other groups, and one movement will have a completely different meaning.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: My performances are more realistic, elegant and personal than others.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: I can sing and dance ethnic music by myself and make my heart and spirit as one.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: Since our spirit drum is a wholly unique form of performance, it is hard to really say how it is similar or different to other traditions.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: I was born with a great voice and slinky body, so I sing and dance with my own style.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: The *Sea Grass Melody* I perform is loud and resounding. When I dance, I can play my guitar and dance at the same time; I can use my guitar to conduct.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: My performances are traditional, ancient and primeval. My songs and dances are full of meaning.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT THIS PERFORMANCE? WHAT DOES THIS PIECE MEAN TO YOU?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: I like the ancient songs the most, and those that tell ancient stories.

*He Jinhua (Naxi)*: I like the ones where we express feelings.

*Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: I love this folk art. It has great meaning because I have a full grasp of it.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: My favorite dances are the Tiger, Lion and Hawk dances. When I dance, I feel excited in my heart. I am happy that I can learn the hardest of the Dongba dances.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: For me, I like all the rhythms that I play.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: I like our traditional dancing the most, because it can bring more people to know us. I hope that our ethnic culture can be recognized by more people, and that they can see its artistic qualities.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: My favorites are the love songs. I don't have a remarkable experience with the animal dances.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: My most favorite part is when we sing, dance and play instruments at the same time. That joyous sound of the drumbeat makes me feel forever happy.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: My favorite parts of Huayao dance are the step-ins and interwoven step pieces, because that is the quintessence of our music.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: My favorite is the part in the spirit drum where everyone sings together. This part melds everyone together, and expresses unity and affection.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: My favorite is the beginning of the performance, because that usually doesn't go right.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: I get into character when I perform the 'romance song' or 'smoking the pipe.' My mind goes back to memories of thirty years ago.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: I like the part where we imitate ancient man reveling together with the animals and plants. This part makes me think of Sigangli Drum Culture; it is the mutual love, unity and friendship between man and nature.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT OR FEEL WHEN YOU ARE PERFORMING?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: I think about my home and my loved ones there, and feel closer to them.

*He Jinhua and Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: When I am performing, I think about the ancestors of the Naxi, who created a rich traditional culture and passed it down to us. They make me proud.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: When I dance the Dongba dance, my heart asks the spirits to protect and bless me. I feel that the spirits give me the power.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: I am old now; I must hurry to complete my life's work of passing this on, so that the wonderful musical arts of my people can pass from generation to generation.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: When I'm performing, I want to pass my own experience to the audience, put my heart into the art and enjoy it together with everyone.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: When I perform, it is just as good as when I was young and singing love songs with my lover, never willing to part. I feel like I've returned to my love life as an 18-year-old.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: When I perform I am thinking that I must perform well. I can't let down Mr. Tian and my own ancestors.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: I feel ecstatic that we are able to bring our Huayao Yi ethnic folk culture to present in the United States.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: What I think about most while performing is whether the performance is bad or the feelings have not been properly expressed. What I feel is joy and pride.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: When performing I just want to sing and dance well. I don't worry about anything else.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: When performing, I am calm, collected and committed to complete the performance. I feel proud when my ethnic traditional culture takes the stage and is passed on and spread along.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: When I perform, I think about how Washan sees me as the "King of Ancient Music," and that is an enormous responsibility.

**HOW ARE YOU TEACHING YOUR TRADITION TO OTHERS IN YOUR VILLAGE OR COMMUNITY?  
IS THIS IMPORTANT TO YOU?**

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: I pass these traditions orally to younger generations. It is very important.

*He Jinhua and Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: I absorbed it from the people around me. It is very important.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: I learned from my ancestors. I feel that this is important to us.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: This type of instrument isn't professionally taught, and few people in a generation actually learn it. Nowadays, to further spread the wonderful ethnic culture, I have created a professional class in my hometown, so that more interested youths can learn how to play. Now there are more than 20 people who can play common rhythms. I am full of hope and quite honored that more youths are able to learn how to play.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: We receive these traditions at a rather young age. When I was young, the older people would teach our tunes, love songs, mountain songs, instruments and dances during spare time in the fields. We would present them together for the Torch Festival, weddings and funerals or other events.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: In my village we pass on these music traditions while smoking together. This is very important to us. When a people stops wearing their ethnic clothing, stops singing and dancing their ethnic music and stops speaking their language, that means the death of a people.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: These traditions are very important to us. We pass them on orally, and I only learned because I loved to learn. This is very important to me and to future generations.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: In our village, these traditions are mostly passed down from the older generation, but also studied together among the youth.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: When we pass our traditions on in our village, the elders begin by telling us of the songs' origins, followed by explaining their meaning before showing us or handing it to us. These songs are very important to us.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: The better ones in our village teach these things to those children and grown women, to pass on and spread our ethnic culture.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: In our village, I organize events for market days and when there isn't work to do in the fields. This is for mutual exchange and study. I have also started a class for passing on traditions at the village school, to teach our people's children the sense of pride and responsibility they should have towards their ethnic culture. It is my duty to pass on this wonderful traditional culture from generation to generation.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: The elders teach these traditions during all of the rituals, holidays and big events of the Washan tribe. It is very important, because we are inviting the sun, moon and all the earth's spirits to join us and pray for peace and bountiful harvest.

**WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?**

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: I am most proud of my gourd flute arts.

*He Jinhua and Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: I am most proud of being able to come and perform in America.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: I am most proud of the fact that the Dongba dance tradition can find a vessel within my body to be passed on to other generations.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: What our people didn't care much about for centuries has recently been praised by experts and scholars in China and abroad.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: When the performance is over, and the clapping begins, that's when I feel proud, because our traditional ethnic dance has been appreciated and enjoyed by more people from all walks of life, and our unique dances have been spread further.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: I am most proud and moved by the opportunity to present China's ethnic classical cultures to the outside world and be warmly received by audiences.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: What I am most proud of is that we are able to preserve our traditional culture under the onslaught of modern cultural development.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: I take the most pride in having the opportunity to perform and present my own music and embroideries in the United States.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: What makes me most proud is that I carry this tradition beyond the gates of the nation so that foreigners can know and understand our people.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: What makes me proud is that I am praised by people wherever I go to perform.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: I have already brought our ethnic culture to the world, carried it on and spread it across the land.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: I am most proud of the fact that I have learned how to make and play the traditional musical instruments of my people.

WHAT OTHER OPPORTUNITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE IN THE FUTURE WITH YOUR PERFORMANCE?

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM FOR YOUR TRADITION? AND FOR YOURSELF?

*Gen Dequan (Dai)*: To perform in internationally renowned venues, pass on ethnic and folk arts and to perform together with internationally renowned musicians.

*He Jinhua and Li Xiuxiang (Naxi)*: I dream of bringing Naxi traditional music to the whole world.

*Yang Yuhua (Naxi)*: I hope that in the future I can have more opportunities to present the Dongba dance in more places. I hope that our traditions can be passed to future generations. I want to learn these dances better and more fully, so that I can pass them on.

*A Jiawen (Yi)*: I hope that there will be others to carry on after me. I also hope that more musicians, instrumental experts and scholars from China and abroad can come to know our wonderful Yi ethnic music and can introduce it to more friends.

*Cha Yongying (Yi)*: I hope that as I present my ethnic group's dances and home on the stage, my dream is to get more help from more people throughout society who know and care about this, and can spread the unique traditional ethnic cultures.

*Hou Baoyun (Yi)*: I hope to perform all over the world, especially the United States. I plan to write about my traditional culture for my descendants, and make a CD to pass on to later generations.

*Luo Fengxue (Yi)*: I hope that I can perform all over the world, and I hope that I can get help from people around the country and across the world to spread our ethnic traditional culture.

*Pu Fazheng (Yi)*: My greatest hope is to bring our ethnic music and ethnic embroidery abroad to perform and present. I long for the day when our traditions can be passed across the world. We will be able to push our music and embroidery out across the world some day.

*Pu Jiufen (Yi)*: I hope that I can perform this in Beijing in 2008 (Olympics). I am dreaming about letting people across the nation know and understand these traditions. I hope even more to let the people of the world know and understand these traditions.

*Pu Meifang (Yi)*: I hope that experts and scholars can support and guide us to better pass on and spread our ethnic traditional culture. I now have even greater dreams about tradition, and I hope that these traditions can be sustained and passed to future generations.

*Shi Wanheng (Yi)*: I still hope to bring our ethnic culture to the world. It is my dream for the world to better understand our ethnic cultural arts.

*Yan Bing (Wa)*: I hope to spread the Sigangli Drum Culture performances around the world. I dream of one day passing on Washan's traditional culture...