

Yunwei in Nakhi Ethnic Minority Music: Shift from *Gongche* Notation and Oral Transmission to Simplified Notation Starting 1970s

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Abstract

During the 1970s, musicians of the Nakhi ethnic minority, one of China's fifty-six recognized minorities, transitioned from oral transmission and indigenous *gongche* notation, methods used for thousands of years, to ciphered notation. They intensely debated whether to move away from tradition and which notation could better capture *yunwei* (akin to authenticity). The article explores the musical meaning of *yunwei* to Nakhi musicians. *Yunwei* transcends written notations; it represents a fluid aesthetic understanding of a music piece, rooted in the original interpretation yet open to innovation, and evolves alongside commercial and cultural tourism influences. The ongoing negotiation between international World Heritage institutions, the State, and individual musicians complicates the definition of *yunwei*. It involves three levels of validation: UNESCO's recognition of Nakhi as a World Heritage Site, the State's acknowledgment of musicians as "cultural bearers" within its patronage system, and these recognized "cultural bearers'" assessment of the authenticity of students' music performances. This analysis invites a reevaluation of notation as a dynamic interface between tradition and modernity, suggesting its value lies in documenting musical pitches and rhythms and in its capacity to engage with the deeper, often intangible aspects of cultural heritage and identity.

Keywords: authenticity, *yunwei*, music notation, Nakhi minority, *gongche* notation, simplified notation

1. Transcending Notation: The Quest for *Yunwei* in Contemporary Nakhi Music

"Many of my students nowadays don't understand that the *jian pu* (ciphered notation) does not capture the *yunwei* (akin to the concept of authenticity) of the *dong jing* music (Taoist scripture music, a branch of Nakhi music). Unless you are playing *dizi* (flutes), you must re-comprehend the melody by listening and learning from the elders," He Zhaolin said in our interview in (He 2023).¹ He Zhaolin was born in 1959. He is a Nakhi ethnic minority instrument maker who started to learn Nakhi music from his dad at 13 years old. His comments on the younger generation's shift away from the *gongche* notation and oral transmission reveal the tension at the heart of contemporary Nakhi music-making in Yunnan.

The Nakhi ethnic minority is one of the fifty-six ethnic minorities in Yunnan, China. It has a rich tradition of music, *dong jing* music, ritual Taoist music, and *baishaxi* music, a form of funeral music. Lijiang's *dongjing* music fits firmly into the Han Chinese tradition. Since the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD), Nakhi have notated their music in *gongche* notation, a character notation many Han melodic genres have used, similar to Western Solfège in that syllables indicate scale degrees.² However, many handwritten *gongche*-notated music scores were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The performance of Dongjing music and Baisha music was labeled "backward" and a "feudal superstition" and prohibited. The music manuscripts and instruments hidden in the

¹ Kelly Yang, interview with He Zhaolin, August 17, 2023.

² Helen Rees, (2000). *Echoes of History: Nakhi Music in Modern China*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 83.

musicians' houses were confiscated or burnt by the Red Guards, the youth militia mobilized by Mao. After the Cultural Revolution, the People's Republic of China (PRC) started to sponsor the revival of Nakhi music heritage. The government assessed and validated state-sponsored *feiyi chuanchengren* (intangible cultural heritage bearers), who are responsible for recollecting, archiving, performing, and passing down the Nakhi music.¹ In 1981, previously imprisoned Nakhi musicians like Xuan Ke, whom I have interviewed, founded the first Nakhi music ensemble — *Dayan Nakhi Ancient Music Ensemble* — and had commercial performances that attracted 13,213 domestic and international tourists from fifty-two countries by early 1993.² The concert ticket for one show was around 35 *yuan*, or \$4.25, in July 1998. While the musicians profited from performing the music, they also helped revive, promote, and pass down the Nakhi music traditions post-Cultural Revolution. In the 2000s, Xuan Ke also started to recruit younger musicians, teaching them phrase by phrase orally, with assistance from *gongche* notation. However, Yang Zemin, the student of Xuan Ke, whom I interviewed in 2023, told me that many younger musicians now preferred using numbered notation, a notation popular in East Asian music, and started abandoning the traditional indigenous *gongche* notation.³ In 2004, Xuan Ke sued Mr. Wu, who criticized the Nakhi music as inauthentic in his article in *Art Criticism* magazine.⁴ One of the focuses of their dispute was whether the music played by the Dayan Nakhi Music Association in the tourism market is authentic Nakhi music. Ultimately, the Association won the lawsuit. The lawsuit has been subject to intense discussion; Nakhi musicians have increasingly stressed the importance of *yunwei* and debated which notation can best capture the *yunwei* (a concept akin to authenticity in English) of Nakhi music when passing down their music.

When did the musicians gradually shift away from the *gongche* notation after thousands of years since the Song dynasty, and why? What is it about *gongche* notation and oral transmission that can not be captured in *jian pu* (ciphered/simplified) notation? What, then, constitutes *yunwei* in Nakhi music, according to the musicians, both young and the elders? The complexity of determining *yunwei* and its transmission is heightened by the disparities in authority regarding who is recognized as a legitimate “cultural bearer” within the framework of state sponsorship. This issue is further complicated by the tension between the preservation of *yunwei* and the forces of commercialization propelled by the growth of cultural tourism, alongside the critical imperative to rejuvenate Nakhi music traditions following the destruction of *gongche* music scores during the Cultural Revolution.

In 2000, ethnomusicologist Helen Rees explored the learning process of Nakhi music using *gongche* notation and trans-notated it to numbered/cyphered notation in her book “Echoes of History: Nakhi Music in Modern China.” However, she did not analyze why the Nakhi musicians shifted from the *gongche* notation to ciphered notation or how authenticity took a role in such transformation.⁵ In 2021, Faculties of Geographical Science researchers at Beijing Normal University, Dawei Li and Shangyi Zhou, evaluated the authenticity of Nakhi Music in Lijiang Town through Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory, highlighting the transition from a pre-mirror stage, where Nakhi music established a legitimizing identity, through a mirror stage marked by adaptive changes to cater to tourists' preferences, to a post-mirror stage characterized by proactive efforts from Nakhi musicians to preserve and innovate their musical heritage while addressing previous compromises. Additionally, Li and Zhou contrast tourists' and performers' perceptions of authenticity, advocating for a humanist perspective that transcends mere commonalities to embrace shared human values and advancing humanity as the ultimate goal. Li and Zhou also apply Castells' identity theory to chart the emotional and cultural evolution of Nakhi musicians, acknowledging both the challenges of maintaining artistic integrity in the face of global tourism and the potential for authentic artistic expression and innovation.⁶

Supported by a grant from the National Natural Science Foundation of China in 2023, Li Dawei analyzes tourism authenticity from the “dao” (nature) perspective in Tao Te Ching across three levels: self, group, and totality. “The nature of the self” focuses on individual authenticity, where personal experiences and adaptation to changes underscore the evolution of Nakhi music, transitioning from religious to folk music and facing endangerment due

¹ Government of the People's Republic of China, Procedures for the Identification and Management of Representative Inheritors of National Intangible Cultural Heritage, last modified December 14, 2020, https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/zcfg/bmgz/202012/t20201214_919516.html.

² Helen Rees, (2000). *Echoes of History: Nakhi Music in Modern China*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 151.

³ Kelly Yang, interview with Yang Zemin, August 14, 2023.

⁴ China National Radio, (2004, November 17). “Xuan Ke debated on the Authenticity of Nakhi Music with Editor of Magazine Art Criticism, After Seven Hours of Intense Argument in Court, It Ended Without a Result.” Sina Weibo, <https://news.sina.com.cn/c/2004-11-17/08254260708s.shtml>.

⁵ Helen Rees, (2000). *Echoes of History: Nakhi Music in Modern China*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 86-88.

⁶ Li, D., Zhou, S., (2021). “Evaluating the Authenticity of Nakhi Music in Three Stages from the Perspective of Nakhi Musicians: An Application of Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory.” *Sustainability*, 13, 3720. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073720>.

to changing societal roles. This level emphasizes the musicians' and audiences' intrinsic connection to their heritage, navigating through periods of suppression and revival, showcasing resilience and the personal drive to preserve Nakhi music's essence. "The nature of society" addresses the group's authenticity, highlighting the societal construction and interpersonal relationships within the Nakhi community. Post-1978 economic reforms led to a resurgence in Nakhi music, transforming its role within the local and broader social systems. This period saw the emergence of cooperative efforts across social strata, including during natural disasters and in the burgeoning tourism industry. This brought about the commercialization of Nakhi music and fostered community bonds and a shared cultural identity. This level illustrates the dynamic interplay between social structures and cultural practices, where music becomes a medium for societal cohesion and cultural authenticity. "The universal way of nature" pertains to the overall authenticity, contemplating the integration of Nakhi music within a broader cultural and historical context. This perspective considers the impact of tourism and globalization, where local livelihoods, social harmony, and cultural vibrancy are at play. The blending of Nakhi music with other cultural elements and its recognition as intangible cultural heritage signify a move towards a more inclusive understanding of authenticity, where adaptation and preservation coexist. This level reflects on the adaptive strategies of the Nakhi people in preserving their musical heritage amidst changing economic landscapes and societal values, suggesting a holistic approach to cultural authenticity that embraces change while honoring tradition.¹

Despite applying Taoism's "nature" concept and Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory, the discourse on Nakhi music has yet to fully engage with the nuanced concept of *yunwei* musically. The ongoing debate among Nakhi musicians regarding the shift away from traditional *gongche* notation and its role in shaping what *yunwei* means in Nakhi music remains unaddressed. The essay is based on my year-long ethnographic research, local archives of Nakhi music scriptures in *gongche* and numbered notation, and interviews conducted with musicians of different gender, musical education backgrounds, and state patronage statuses from 2020 to 2023. I interviewed musicians, including the renowned founder of Dali Nakhi Music Ensemble, Xuan Ke, his student Yang Zemin, who has received professional Western and traditional Han music training, state-validated Nakhi musicians like Zhou QiuHong, non-state-validated independent Nakhi instrument makers like He Zhaolin, and so on.

The Nakhi musicians' critical concern in determining which notation to use is whether it helps them capture the *yunwei* of their music. Beyond juxtaposing the different opinions of the Nakhi musicians on which notation to use, I analyze what *yunwei* means in the context of Nakhi music. I argue that it is not necessarily the *gongche* or numbered notation that helps the musicians capture the *yunwei* of the Nakhi music but the phrase-by-phrase learning process with the elders in which the notation forces the musicians to immerse themselves. The analysis of *yunwei* and critique on the shift from *gongche* to *jianpu* notation transcends the discussion of contemporary Nakhi music-making and preservation. It raises the critical questions on what musical notations do and do not do, for whom they are for, and what purpose they serve.

2. Shifting from *Gongche* Notation to Ciphered Notation: Is Music Notation Central to the Discourse on *Yunwei*?

Since the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), Nakhi musicians have passed down their music orally with assistance from the *gongche* notation. The *gongche* notation is a traditional character notation written vertically, and according to the conventional standard, the rows are read in order, moving from right to left. However, there are also exceptions to the rule. Some younger musicians born in the 1950s were influenced by modern writing protocols, which write horizontally from left to right. The notation is similar to Western Solfège in that syllables indicate scale degrees.² However, rhythms, phrasing, or ornamentation are seldom notated in the *gongche* notation, so the musicians have to rely on oral transmission when learning the music using the notation. Figure 1 is my photocopy of Nakhi instrument maker He Zhaolin's score manuscript notated in *gongche*.³ Zhaolin, born in 1959, learned *gongche* notation and the Nakhi music repertoire from his father and the village music teacher from primary school. The music teacher sang in *gongche* characters, and he transcribed all the *dongjing* music repertoire in *gongche* notation on an exercise book. He told me that it took a long time to transcribe these repertoires. He wrote this score seven or eight times to ensure that it accurately reflected the melody his music teacher sang. The piece in Figure 1 is called "Sheep on the Hills" (*Shanpo Yang*). Zhaolin did not notate traditionally, vertically from up to down, but horizontally from left to right. Through Figure 1, I want to illustrate that *gongche* notation does not capture musical phrasing, rhythm, or ornamentation. Zhaolin wrote down all the pitches linearly without any spaces between the phrases. His exercise book is a rare archive of Nakhi's music repertoire. He successfully hid it from the Red Guards in the corner of his house while most Nakhi manuscripts were destroyed during the Cultural

¹ "Analysis on Layers of Tourism Authenticity from the Perspective of 'Nature' in Tao Te Ching: A Case Study of the Development of Nakhi Music in Lijiang, China." (2023). *Tourism Tribune*, 38(10), 110-122.

² Helen Rees, (2000). *Echoes of History: Nakhi Music in Modern China*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 83.

³ Kelly Yang, (2020). He Zhaolin's Manuscript on the Piece "Sheep on the Hills", by Kelly Yang, Yunnan.

Revolution.

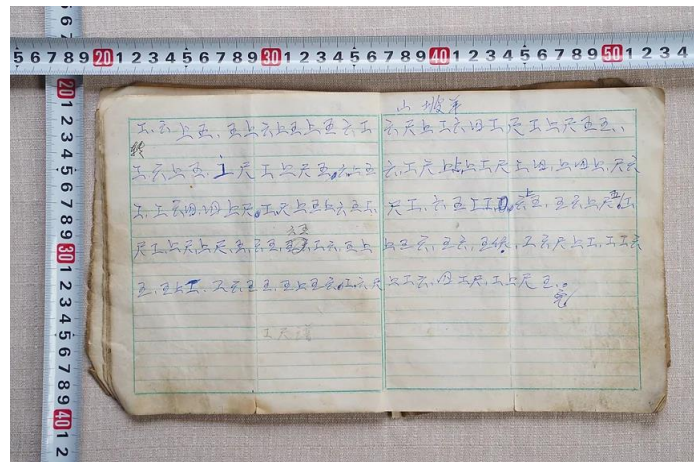


Figure 1. He Zhaolin's Manuscript on the Piece "Sheep on the Hills," Photo by Author in 2020 Summer in Yunnan

Learning the Nakhi music repertoire in *gongche* notation requires mentorship and a lot of phrase-by-phrase practice with the elders. The students always start by singing the music. As Yang Zemin, the student of the founder of the Dayan Nakhi music ensemble Xuan Ke, says, students began learning singing because "voices are the most organic instruments the musicians naturally possess."¹ The students must practice thousands of times before playing the music with their preferred instruments. Once the elder validates that the students have captured the right *yunwei* of the music, they move to the next step: playing the music on their instrument. The student needs to learn the music pieces again on the instrument they are interested in, with the instrument expert within their region.

The lack of rhythm and ornamentation in *gongche* notation required the musicians to sing with the surviving Nakhi elders, who were imprisoned and persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. Some gave up playing their instruments after they were freed from prison after the Cultural Revolution. Still, some musicians, like Xuan Ke, started recruiting and commercializing the music that helped these imprisoned musicians make a living with their musical knowledge. Learning the music phrase by phrase, mimicking the phrasing, ornamentation, and artistic nuances of the elderly musicians, is a precious opportunity for the students because only a few elders have survived the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). A decade after the Cultural Revolution, from 1987 to 1988, Nakhi scholar Yang Zenglie conducted an age distribution survey on the seven active Nakhi music groups (those in Dayan Town, Baisha Village, Jinshan Township, Baisha Township, Changshui Village, Lashi Township, and Shigu Town). The results were as follows²:

80 or over: 8 men (6.4 %)

70-79: 41 men (33 %)

60-69: 24 men (20 %)

50-59: 19 men (15.6 %)

40-49: 13 men (10.5 %)

30-39: 15 men (12 %)

20-29: 4 men (3.2 %)

under 20: 0 men/women (0 %)

The survey illustrates the preponderance of elderly musicians (50 years old above) in these music ensembles, and it raises concerns about the ability of the musical tradition to endure as the pre-Cultural Revolution generation, those who were above 40 years old in 1987, passed away. With only four musicians in the 20-29 age group having taken up Nakhi music a decade post-Revolution, the findings indicate a looming threat to the continuity of this cultural heritage, suggesting a diminished engagement from younger generations. Yang Zemin, born in 1976, told me in a 2023 interview that no more than 100 elderly musicians, who are masters of the Nakhi repertoire, remain

¹ Kelly Yang, interview with Yang Zemin, August 14, 2023.

² Xuan Ke and Yang Zenglie F., (1997). *Program Notes for Hong Kong Concerts of Dayan Nakhi Ancient Music Association*.

alive in Lijiang town.¹ Because most of the music phrasing, ornaments, and rhythms are not indicated in the *gongche* notation and the number of elders who mastered the *yunwei* is declining, it became essential for the students to learn the music orally, phrase by phrase from the elders, if the students were to capture the *yunwei* of the Nakhi tune.

During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards destroyed numerous music scripts notated in *gongche*. At the beginning of the 21st century, cipher notation, a symbol of “modernized” aesthetic education, gradually gained popularity in the music conservatories of China. The cipher/simplified notation gradually replaced the use of the *gongche* notation that had been in use since the Ming and Qing dynasties.² The simplified notation uses Arabic numerals (to represent the relative pitch (scale degree name)).

Because it is relatively accessible and easy to understand compared to the Chinese characters, it has become a powerful tool in popularizing music culture. Now, most of the mass amateur music groups, such as amateur bands, singing groups, and art troupes, which are spontaneously organized in rural areas below the county level, still use simplified scores as a tool for teaching, practicing, and playing music.³ Yang Zemin, a student of Xuan Ke confessed that it is more convenient to teach younger generations with simplified/ciphered notation because “it can notate all the techniques that the musicians use, including the glissando and mordents, etc, which could not notated with *gongche* notation.”⁴ Figure 2 and Figure 3 are music scores of “Sheep On the Hills” created by the Lijiang Ancient Town Intangible Cultural Center in ciphered/simplified notation and *gongche* notation.⁵ In addition to ornaments, the simplified notation also indicates the tonality (C#, in this case), the tempo ($\text{♩} = 72$), the meter (2/4), the bar, the repeat sign, the exact rhythm, the breathing sign, and tempo change.

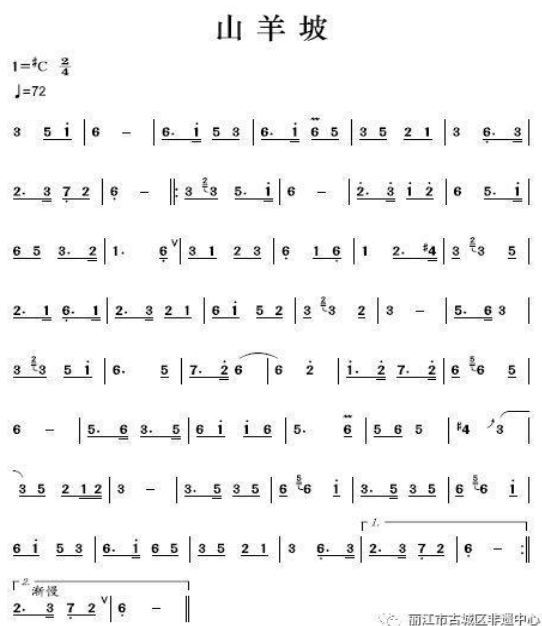


Figure 2. Ciphered/Simplified Notation

Music score of “Sheep on the Hills” by Lijiang Ancient Town Intangible Cultural Center

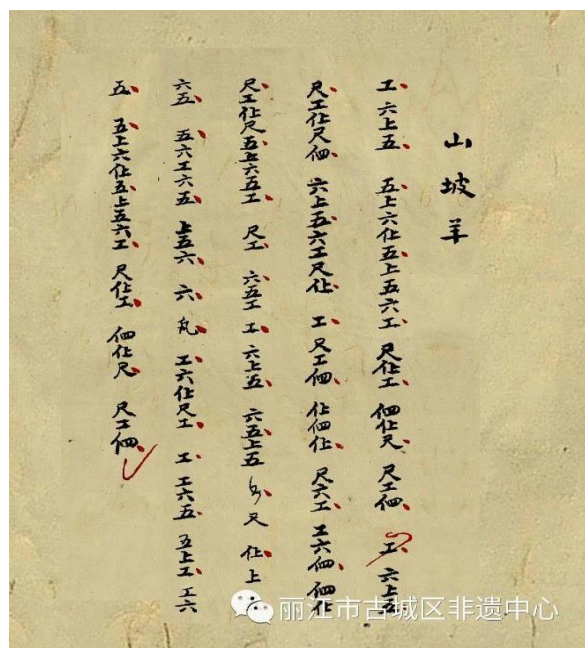


Figure 3. *Gongche* Notation

However, Yang Zemin, a student of Xuanke, confessed that even with simplified notation, students should still

¹ Kelly Yang, interview with Yang Zemin, August 14, 2023.

² Qi Yi and Zhao Jian, (2003). “The Creation, Development, and Importation of Cipher Notation to China”. *Journal of the Adult Education College of Hebei University*, 5(2), 27-28.

³ Lei Xiaoyi, (2018). “A Brief Discussion on Simplified Score.” *Northern Music*, 38(17), 7-8. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:BYYY.0.2018-17-014>.

⁴ Kelly Yang, interview with Yang Zemin, August 14, 2023.

⁵ Lijiang Ancient Town District Intangible Cultural Heritage Center. “Lijiang Dongjing Music — 03 ‘Sheep on the Hillside’.” March 1, 2021. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/cfGrKjpYiAt9InMid8TZa>.

sing with the elders or listen to the recording of the elders; the students can then go home and learn by themselves.¹ Indeed, the tension in contemporary Nakhi music-making might not originate from the *gongche* notation shift to ciphered notation. Both *gongche* notation and simplified notation have their shortcomings in capturing the *yunwei*: while the simplified notation can record more musical details and is easier to learn, it may inadvertently encourage musicians to bypass traditional, phrase-by-phrase learning process with elders, which the musicians believe are the essential part in capturing the *yunwei*.

3. *Yunwei, Weidao* in Nakhi Music: How Can Musicians Reproduce It, or Can They?

Then, what is the *yunwei* in Nakhi music that almost all musicians that I interviewed stressed and reinforced? In this essay, I use the original Nakhi word *yunwei* and do not translate *yunwei* or *weidao* in the Nakhi dialect as directly equivalent to “authenticity.” *Yunwei* in the Nakhi dialect has a rich connotation and is used not only in a musical context. The character *yun* translates to sweet and harmonic sounds. It also means the final sound of the Chinese syllable when used in *yunmu*. *Wei* means taste, smell, or flavor. It can describe both humans, food, and odor. It means human touch or kindness in *renqing wei*, perfume odor in *xiangshui wei*, and the smell of cooked dish when describing food. *Yunwei*, thus, not only refers to the quality of musical tone but has a feminine connotation. It denotes the lingering charm, particularly when describing a woman.²

Nakhi musicians I interviewed explained that *yunwei* is a musical aesthetic that makes their music distinctly Nakhi. It is an artistic choice that makes a piece of music aesthetically beautiful, emotionally compelling, and culturally rich. It's a quality that elevates music from mere sound to an art form that profoundly touches the human spirit.

Yunwei involves subtle artistic choices in performance that add layers of complexity and beauty to the music. According to Yang Zemin, *yunwei* is the ornamentation the elders add to the plain tune that makes the music sound particularly indigenous and local.³ The ornamentation is not captured in the *gongche* notated music scores because the notation only records the main melody of the repertoire. So, the students have to learn the unique ornamentations for each instrument from the elders phrase by phrase. The structure of the musical phrase is mostly the same, but the ornamentation and musical interpretations vary from instrument to instrument. Take the first phrase of *Sheep on Hills* as an example; Yang Zemin sang to me the different musical interpretations of the same phrase if it were played on flutes and string instruments like *jinghu*, and *zhonghu*. He recited in *gongche* characters, and I transcribed each interpretation to staff notation. The *gongche* music scores only record the main melody, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. First Phrase of *Sheep on Hills* in Staff Notation⁴

In contrast, *jinghu*, a Chinese bowed string instrument in the *huqin* family, usually plays fewer notes in the first phrase:



Figure 5. First Phrase of *Sheep on Hills* in Staff Notation (*jinghu* version)⁵

¹ Kelly Yang, interview with Yang Zemin, August 14, 2023.

² Oxford University Press and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing Co., Ltd., (2010, 2020). *Oxford Chinese Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ Kelly Yang, interview with He Xiuqiong, August 14, 2023.

⁴ Transcription by the author.

⁵ Transcription by the author.

But the *zhonghu*, a low-pitched Chinese bowed string instrument in the *huqin* family, has much more ornamentation:



Figure 6. First Phrase of *Sheep on Hills* in Staff Notation (*zhonghu* version)¹

Nakhi musicians stress that all the musicians share the same music score, which only has the main melody. Because the ornamentations and musical interpretations, artistic choices that make the performance full of *yunwei* or *weidao*, are not captured in the scores, it becomes crucial for the musicians to learn the music orally phrase by phrase, with the elders.

Yunwei also involves the tone and the timbre of the singer. *Baishaxi* music is a branch of Nakhi music for funerals that translates to fine tunes from *baisha*. The music repertoire has lyrics, so *yunwei*, according to Yang Chunjuan, a local Baisha woman musician, is also about the vocal style and the tone. Because *baishaxi* music is composed for funerals, Chunjuan emphasized that she uses *kuqiang* (crying tone) when singing the music: “If you sing using the ciphered notation, [which only gives the main melody of the piece and has no ornamentation], you will sound *siban* [rigid, inflexible]. So when I learned the *baishaxi* music, my teacher, He Maogen [the only musician who memorized the entire Baisha music repertoire] taught me phrase by phrase.”²

Yunwei also lies in instrumentation and collaboration. If sung by a solo voice, a Nakhi tune no longer has *yunwei*. Zemin and Zhaolin noted that the Nakhi tunes are composed intentionally for ensembles. Each instrument has a solo section where the musicians can showcase their technical skills or interpretation of the musical phrase while the remaining musicians accompany the solo. The solo sections are like sea waves, one instrument after another, “wave after wave,” said He Xiuqiong in her interview.³ *Yunwei* lies in each solo section, and it is what makes the music aesthetically pleasing. Unlike Western music, no conductor is standing in front of the ensemble, the *shanzhang* (which is similar to the conductor) plays the *shimian yunluo* (nine-pitch gong) to indicate the tempo, so *yunwei* is also about collaboration between the musicians. He Zhaolin, the instrument maker, says: “Nakhi music is not only about ‘showing off’ in the solo part but also about collaboration between different musicians.”⁴

Yunwei is also closely associated with tonality. The musicians are not necessarily familiar with the Western tonality, nor are they familiar with the Western pitch names. However, from generation to generation, most musicians have been singing the C# pentatonic scale (C#, D#, E#, G#, A#) unconsciously, even though the *gongche* notation notates in relative pitch. The Nakhi music instruments are tuned according to the nine-pitch percussion instrument played by the *shan-zhang* (conductor). The nine-pitch gong has been made in C# major for thousands of years. Figure 2 is a pitch illustration of the instrument in *gongche*, Western, and numbered notation, drawn by instrument maker He Zhaolin.⁵ Zemin said that because Nakhi musicians have been using the nine-pitch gong made in C# major for thousands of years, it has cultivated a form of aesthetic or *yunwei* that the Nakhi musicians are familiar with and make their music distinctively Nakhi. He tried to perform the tunes in other tonality before with his ensemble. However, “it felt weird,” he said.⁶

¹ Transcription by the author.

² Kelly Yang, interview with Yang Chunjuan, August 17, 2023.

³ Kelly Yang, interview with He Xiuqiong, August 16, 2023.

⁴ Kelly Yang, interview with He Zhaolin, August 18, 2023.

⁵ Kelly Yang, He Zhaolin’s Illustration of the Pitch of the *Shimian Yunluo* (Nine-pitch Gong), 2020, by Kelly Yang, Yunnan.

⁶ He, Zhaolin, interview by Kelly Yang. August 18, 2024.

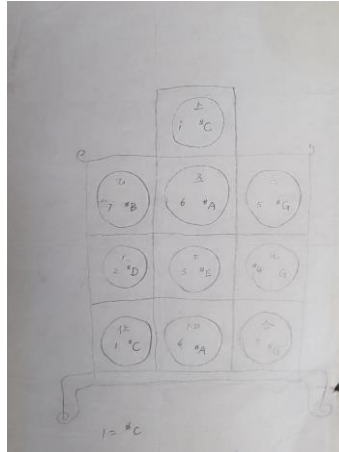


Figure 7. He Zhaolin's Illustration of the Pitch of the *Shimian Yunluo* (Nine-pitch Gong)



Figure 8. The author's Picture of Shimian Yunluo at the Dali Nakhi Music Ensemble, founded by Xuan Ke

Even though the Nakhi musicians emphasized the importance of learning music phrase by phrase from the elders, they still need to conceptualize *yunwei* as a static, unchanging music interpretation that completely copies the elders. *Yunwei* is not transcribed into fixed music scores because even the elders interpret the music differently every time they perform it. Rather than a fixed way of musical interpretation or pattern, *yunwei* is a distinctive Nakhi style that is fluid and flexible. *Gongche* notation and simplified notation can only partially capture the *yunwei*, because in writing it down, musicians inevitably solidify the fluid aesthetic into a single, tangible way that asserts its authority to the musicians, implying that it is the one correct way of playing the music. While the Nakhi musicians expressed that the heart of the tension was the shift away from the *gongche* to the simplified notation, they also explicitly revealed that *yunwei* both transcends and is rooted in notations, emphasizing the phrase-to-phrase learning process with the elders. The learning process is not intended to copy the elders but to cultivate an aesthetic understanding of the music piece rooted in the original interpretation yet open to innovation. Indeed, *yunwei* both transcends and is rooted in written notations.

John Haines, in discussing the revival of European Medieval Music, argues that the revival of early music, or “ancient music,” was shaped by its obsession with the restoration of things to an “original and pure state.”¹ Authenticities are often associated with “illiteracy.” Timothy D. Taylor observes that the construction of “native” by music fans involves “premodern,” “untainted,” and thus musically “the same as they ever were.”² The earliest European observers also viewed the “unspoiled, unmodern, unmanufactured” savage as living lives that modernized Europeans could only envy: natural, innocent. There is also a strong critique of “selloutism”. By definition, “world music musicians cannot be sellouts, since the structures of the music industry exclude virtually all world musicians from the venues, visibility, and profits that might make them appear to be sellouts to their fans.” Authenticity seems to be associated to “primality” and “anti-commercialism,” in opposition to “modernism”

¹ Bithell, C., & Hill, J. (Eds.), (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*. Oxford University Press. (p. 73).

² Taylor, T. D., (1997). *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*. Routledge. (p. 21).

and “sellouts.” However, this is not true for the Nakhi. For the Nakhi musicians, not only has their music successfully attracted tourists from all over the world since the mid-20th century, but cultural tourism has also become an essential way to help them revive their music. Musicians believe they can still be “authentic” even when presented as sellouts. Authenticity also does not imply pre-modern or savageness. Because their music was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, these cultural tourism performances that attracted international tourists are their manifestations and embodiment of “modernism.” Xuan Ke responds to Mr. Wu’s criticism on commercialization and industrialization of Nakhi: “Why are commercialization and cultural preservation in dichotomy? If the musicians can’t even feed themselves, why would they perform music?”¹ For the Nakhi musicians, *yunwei* transcends mere musical notation, embodying a dynamic aesthetic that evolves in tandem with commercial and cultural tourism influences.

4. *Yunwei* in Nakhi: A Fluid Aesthetics Rooted in and Transcend the Music Notation

The exploration of *yunwei* within the context of Nakhi music, juxtaposed with the critique of the transition from traditional gongche to modern ciphered notation, elevates the discourse beyond mere considerations of musical preservation and adaptation. This scholarly inquiry illuminates the multifaceted role of musical notation as a technical tool for capturing sound and as a cultural artifact that embodies and transmits the intrinsic values and aesthetic nuances of a musical tradition. By scrutinizing the shift in notation practices, the analysis provocatively interrogates the efficacy of notation systems in representing the authentic essence—*yunwei*—of Nakhi music, thereby challenging us to reconsider for whom these notations are created and the ultimate objectives they aim to achieve. This critical perspective invites a reevaluation of notation as a dynamic interface between tradition and modernity, suggesting that its value lies not solely in its ability to document musical pitches and rhythms but in its capacity to engage with the deeper, often intangible aspects of cultural heritage and identity.

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