



Exploring polyphony in response singing (*yaqiang*) during the “pipe-smoking event” of the Yi people

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Abstract

The “pipe-smoking event” of the Yi, a minority group in Honghe County in southern Yunnan, is a group musical activity of singing dialogues between young males and females. This singing has very strict rules: not only must the lyrics consist of a certain number of syllables and rhymes, the singing must contain different melodic passages, phrases and various forms. The performance can be either soloistic or in dialogue with another singer, the latter takes the form of feedback from the opposite gender to the main singer. This kind of singing often occurs when the main singer flirts with the other singer and the flirtation becomes intense enough to motivate the other singer to respond. This behavior of singing is relatively fixed. The response melody has a descending contour, opposite to the ascending contour of the main singer; together they create a polyphonic sound. This kind of polyphony has neither a strict singing part nor a fixed interval or rhythm, but it shows the **polyphonic phenomena** as well as the **polyphonic concept** of the Yi group. The lyrical dialogue of females and males at the pipe-smoking event is the reason why this kind of polyphony exists.

According to a nationwide census conducted in China in 2010, the population of the Yi group was estimated at 8,714,393, or 0.6538% of the total national population. The Yi group is the sixth-largest minority ethnic group in the country;¹ its members live in a wide range of regions and belong to many branches.

¹ “Population census information of China in 2010” : <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexce.htm>. Checked on March 18, 2015.

Remarkable differences in musical forms are observed between branches. Among all, the pipe-smoking event (*chi huocaoyan*) – a musical activity unique to the Yi of Honghe County – is nationally known as a traditional social activity, with the singing often continuing through the night. Sande Nowa introduces the folk music and dance of Chinese ethnic minority groups in his 430-page book *The Appreciation of Chinese Minority Folk Music and Dance*, published in 2007. The author describes this social/music activity over six pages; it is the most detailed section on the Yi group found in the book.

In a pipe-smoking event young men and women sing in an antiphonic style, using rich and complex lyrics and forms. Not only do word counts, arrangements and lyrical rhymes conform to strict rules, but musical structures are also characterized by melodic passages, e.g. *haicaiqiang* (lit. “seaweed melodic passage”), *shanyaoqiang* (lit. “sweet potato melodic passage”), and *Wushanqiang* (Wushan melodic passage); phrases, e.g. *juqiang*, (singing in a polite, yielding manner) *zhengqu* (main part), and *baihua* (dialogic singing in an easy way); and forms, e.g. *huadianer*^{*2}, *touqiang*, *erqiang*, *sanqiang*, etc.³ The singing form varies as well, including solo, dialogic (*duichang*), tutti, and response (*yaqiang*) singing.^{*4} When the singing progresses to the *baihua* phase, the main singer, regardless of gender, usually creates lyrics to praise, flirt or make fun of the other party. As more and more deliberately designed words are sung, listeners who become uneasy or feel embarrassed break in to express their feelings; this forms the response part of the song. Singers of the opposite gender usually sing dialogically at the end of the praise or flirt. This pattern is repeated over and over again all night long, and makes the singing party a particularly playful and joyful occasion.

In the dialogic style of singing, participants of both sexes are given the opportunity to demonstrate their wit and talent.⁵ When a man is short of words or fails to respond in time, he is deprived of his chance to smoke the pipe, and the privilege goes to the next man. Wang Shenghua has a precise description of this activity:

...young men and women in the Yi group get to know each other and build closer friendships through the pipe-smoking event, in which they demonstrate their wit, language, singing and the ability to create verse. It is the best opportunity to understand and select a mate before marriage.⁶

The activity itself is also considered relevant to the ancient marriage form of the Yi.⁷

^{*2} even-numbered phrases with 5 words in every phrase [YL].

³ He Qixiang, ed., *Folk Songs of Shiping County in Honghe Zhou, Yunnan, China* (Kunming: Nationalities of Yunnan cbs., 2010), 5-45.

^{*4} In Chinese there is a distinction between response singing (*yaqing*) and dialogic singing (*duichang*). In response singing the singer can sing more than one sentence, whereas in dialogic singing, the singers each sing one sentence and, thus, create a “dialogue”. [YL]

⁵ Interview with Li Huaixiu, January 16, 2015.

⁶ Wang Shenghua, “Investigation Report of Yi Group’s Folk Performing Arts in Shiping County of Yunnan,” *Journal of Yunnan Arts University* 2, 2004, 11.

⁷ Bai Zhangfu, “Exploring the Origin of the Yi Group’s *Haicai* Melody”, *Journal of Yunnan Minzu University* 2, 2007, 136.

Polyphonic forms

During a pipe-smoking event, the response singing of the other gender breaks in while the main singer is still singing his or her part (Example 1 and 2). According to an interview with the female singer Li Huaixiu,⁸ the melody of the response singer(s) is to some extent similar to the main singer's last phrase. In Example 1, measures 15-18, the response begins with a long high pitch, and then the melody moves downward, ending at the lowest pitch of the song. This generally describes a relatively fixed outline of a response melody.

It can be observed that the melodic movement of the two response parts, marked in smaller notes in Example 1 and 2 (measures 12-14), differs from the main male singer's basically upward movement (Example 1, measure 14 to the first note of measure 15).

In Example 2, the melody lines of both singers (in this case a female main singer and a male response singer) move downwards; however, when the male response breaks in, the main female singer re-initializes the corresponding response melody (Example 2, the 4th beat of the 10th measure to the end of the 11th measure). It should be noted that after the previous phrase (Example 2, the 3rd beat of the 10th measure), the main female singer should have taken a downward movement. Instead, she takes the upward movement to create a melody corresponding to the relatively next phrase of the response singer (Example 2, the 4th beat of the 10th measure). She then moves the melody slightly upwards in the following two beats, finally ending with a downward melody. Both main singers from Example 1 and 2 happen to choose an upward music pattern to mirror the downward melody movement of the response singing.

In addition, simultaneous responses from more than one person are common in response singing. The singers know the outline of the melody quite well, but due to the vagueness of the outline and the free style of tempo and rhythm, a heterophonic effect is often produced.

Examples 1 and 2: A *baihua* phase, *haicai* melodic passage

Zhang Xingrong (ed.) (2004). *The Peak - A Documentary of the Original Music of Yunnan Ethnic Groups* (10 discs). Kunming: Yunnan Minzu Wenhua Audio & Video publishing. Music from track 18 of Disc 1 "The Yi group".

⁸ Interview with Li Huaixiu, January 16, 2015.

a go mei _____ yi ya _____ 唱的 _____ 这 么 的) 棒 _____ c na _____ a _____ 一 望 e _____

7
一 发 _____ 标 ni 二 望 _____ 水 涛 _____ 涛 ma 脸 擦 _____ 雪 花 _____ 膏 ni 哪 个 _____ 妈 养 _____ 的 怎 会 _____ 漂 成 ji 过 来 我

12
瞧 瞧 mei go _____ e ya _____ 仁 义 么 _____ 说 mei 了 yi _____ ya shiqian mi 压 倒 mei ni 这 块 场 _____ e ya

c _____ ya _____ 瞧 瞧 吓 _____ 到 你
这 句 歌 _____ den 白

Ex. 1: Main singer (male): Shi Wanheng; response singers (female): Shi Yufen, Shi Guiyin.

ago mei _____ yo _____ e ya _____ 唱 的 mei 这 样 mei 丑 _____ c

6
a _____ ma 望 _____ 一 发 _____ 白 mei 二 望 _____ 桃 花 _____ 色 e ya _____ 不 擦 粉 都 _____ mei 白 yo _____

yao _____ shi qian 灵 _____ 人 ni 巧 话 多 _____

13
yo _____ 人 _____ 情 ne _____ ni _____ 仁 义 _____ ne yi yao _____ shiqian 世 _____ 上 都 _____ 都 有 yi

Ex. 2: Main singer (female): Li Huaixiu; response singer: Shi Wanheng

The songs created and performed in the pipe-smoking event feature melisma in free tempos and *huadianer* lyrics, as well as a layering of even-numbered phrases. There is no standard of fixed beats that a response singer must follow when responding to the main singer. The melody lines of both the main and response singers are neither well-arranged nor do they correspond to one another, and there are no defined pitch intervals between the lines. Melodies are relatively free and independent of one another. Can this type of singing be considered polyphonic? In two vocal parts like these, can multiple acoustic natures and/or a combinational logic in their structure be observed? These are the questions to be explored in this article.

What is polyphony?

Polyphonic music exists in many cultures around the world, and can be taken as a common music language. In the view of human evolution, Joseph Jordania believes that the universal presence of polyphony is connected to the origin of human beings.⁹ But what is polyphony?

Polyphony is also referred to as “multi-part voices” in China. Wolf Frobenius attempted to define this terminology in the 2001 edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as “music in more than one part, music in many parts, and the style in which all or several of the musical parts move to some extent independently.”¹⁰

The polyphonic singing of multi-part voices appears in many regions of the world, and long ago caught the attention of many musicologists. For example, Erich M. von Hornbostel, a German ethnomusicologist from the early 20th century, and Marius Schneider, his successor at the Berlin Phonogram-Archiv, were very attracted by this non-western polyphonic music. Schneider’s book *Geschichte der Mehrstimmigkeit*, published in 1934/35, was the first attempt at a comprehensive survey of multi-part practices.¹¹

Diversity of polyphony

There are many types of polyphony. In *Voices of the World: An Anthology of Vocal Expression*, a three-CD set compiled by Hugo Zemp and published by the Musée de l’Homme of France in 1996, singing techniques are categorized into 10 types: calls, cries and clamors; voice and breath; spoken, declaimed, or sung; compass and register; colors and timbres; disguised voices; ornamentation; voices and musical instruments (a., to sing with instrumental accompaniment or b., to emulate musical instruments); employment of harmonics; and polyphony. For vocal polyphony, nine sub-categories exist: heterophony, overlapping, drone, parallel, oblique, and contrary motion, chords, hocketing, and counterpoint.¹²

Joseph Jordania also mentioned polyphony in his book *Why do People Sing? Music in Human Evolution* (2011). In addition to the nine types mentioned above, canonic polyphony and Mongolian *höömii* – in which 2 vocal parts are performed by a single person – are also cited, as “overtone singing” or “harmonic singing”¹³. Moreover, from a sociological perspective, he suggested that the performance of

⁹ Joseph Jordania, *Why do People Sing? Music in Human Evolution* (Tbilisi: The publishing program LOGOS, 2011).

¹⁰ Wolf Frobenius, “Polyphony”, *Grove Music Online*. 2001. Accessed on March 2, 2015.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hugo Zemp, ed., *Voices of the World*. (Paris: CNRS, Musée de l’Homme, 1996), CMX374 1010.12, 105.

¹³ Joseph Jordania, *Why do People Sing? Music in Human Evolution* (Tbilisi: The publishing program LOGOS, 2011), 8-9.

multiple persons in unison be considered “polyphonic”, using the singing of a happy birthday song as an example:

Social polyphony means that during singing there is a coordination and social cooperation between singers. In order to achieve a common sound, singers must coordinate their pitches and rhythm with each other.¹⁴

Because of this, he proposed the term “social polyphony” to describe the phenomenon.¹⁵

In contrast to the concept of polyphony in the West, Zhang Xingrong, a longtime researcher of polyphonic music in the Yunnan area, presents the various types of Yunnan polyphonic music in his book *A Study of Polyphony in Yunnan Ethnic Groups* (2009). In the preface of this book, Chen Yong wrote the following: “Polyphony is consisted of two or more than two independent melodic parts which flow and confront with each other, and develop in coordination.”¹⁶

(In Zhang’s book, the Chinese term *fudiao* is adopted, rather than *fuyin*; both mean polyphony.) It is a concept contrary to monophony, in which a primary melody is accompanied by other melodic parts.¹⁷ In his book, Zhang proposes that Yunnan’s polyphonic music can be categorized into four main types: 1.) heterophony, counterpoint, imitation of vocal or musical instrumental music with a vertical combination of two (or more) independent parts; 2.) multi-rhythmic; 3.) singing in parallels; and 4.) monophonic melody with inherent melodic lines.¹⁸

Zhang uses relatively long paragraphs to describe the second and fourth types; Western scholars have already mentioned the other two. Multi-rhythmic polyphony also includes the differences in sound between percussion ensembles incorporating different materials, timbres, rhythms and structures, as well as different singing metrics, instruments, dance (which is performed at the same time) and later entrances of syncopical imitation by response singers.¹⁹

The fourth type of polyphony refers to the split auditory experience caused by frequent, rapid interval jumps, resulting in the simultaneous perception of separate lower and higher melodic lines. Psychoacoustically, this phenomenon was referred to as “fission” by L. P. A. S. van Noorden in his 1975 dissertation, “Temporal Coherence in the Perception of Tone Sequences”. Sometimes, a pitch is combined with a “fission” from the same or neighboring pitch of a previous large interval jump, or in other words, “as the frequencies of two alternating tones converged, a higher rate of alternation was required for the sequence to split

¹⁴ Ibid. 14

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Zhang Xingrong, *A Study of Polyphonic Music of Yunnan Ethnic Groups* (Kunming: Yunnan University cbs., 2009), 1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 3-4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁰ A. J. M. Houtsma, T. D. Rossing and W. M. Wagenaars, *Auditory Demonstrations*. (Prepared at the Institute for Perception Research (IPO), Eindhoven, supported by the Acoustical Society of America, 1987), 1 Compact Disc 1126-061. 48.

perceptually into two different streams,”²¹ creating what Zhang describes as a “monophonic melody with inherent melodic lines.”

The types of polyphony described by Zhang are common in Yunnan. The polyphony of multiple melodic line types – for example, the one created by different timbres, which has been called a “syncope imitative entrance”²³ in a loose format similar to a canon, which I propose to call pan-canon – is unique to this region. Outside of China, scholars know little about these types. He further explores type 4, a melody with inherent melodic lines (acoustic fission) created by aural limitations.

Identification of polyphony

Most scholars have reached a consensus on the identification of polyphony in a broad sense, though opinions as to the exact definition differ somewhat.

For example, Peter Cooke states that today’s ethnomusicologists generally agree that the term “heterophony” – first proposed by Plato and applied to music by the modern musicologist Carl Stumpf is a “simultaneous variation, accidental or deliberate, of what is identified as the same melody.”²⁴ Therefore, though the sounds are messy and disorganized, some scholars do not consider this polyphony, due to its lack of multi-part melodic movement intention.²⁵

As to the usage of the terms “polyphony” and “multi-part”, Simha Arom, an ethnomusicologist of African music, has his own view. According to him, most multi-part music is polyphonic, but not necessarily all.²⁶ Only those with melodic lines of “multi-part, simultaneousness, hetero-rhythms and non-parallel”²⁷ should be seen as polyphony. Under this definition, heterophony, overlapping, drone-based music, parallelism and homophony are not included in the scope of polyphony.

Compared with scholars who maintain that heterophony is a form of polyphony, there is no doubt that Arom’s definition is far stricter and narrower. To Arom, polyphonic music is a melody of multiple parts and independent melodic movement, with staggered but connective rhythms. This is why Arom excluded

²¹ Deutsch, Diana (1999). “Grouping Mechanisms in Music”, in: *The Psychology of Music*. San Diego: Academic Press. 315.

²² Zhang Xingrong (2009). *Research of the Polyphonic Music of Yunnan Ethnic Groups*, Kunming: Yunnan University, 4.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Peter Cooke, “Heterophony”, *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed on March 2, 2015.

²⁵ Simha Arom, *African Polyphony and Polyrythm: Musical Structure and Methodology*. (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35-36.

²⁶ Simha Arom, *African Polyphony and Polyrythm: Musical Structure and Methodology*. (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35-37.

²⁷ Ibid., 34, 38.

drone-based music and isometric parallelism when conducting his research on polyphony in African music.

The concept or the phenomenon of polyphony

As mentioned above, the definitions of polyphony among scholars are diverse and heavily dependent on context. In order to gain a better understanding of polyphony, knowledge of the singers' thought processes during the implementation of this technique is necessary. Whether the polyphony they produce is a concept or a phenomenon will be discussed below.

Lu Yu-hsiu suggested in her 2007 research paper that the acoustic polyphony could be considered from two standpoints: polyphony as a phenomenon only, where singers do not think about whether different pitches, rhythms and connections between vocal parts are present in their singing; and multi-part singing, performed with the above considerations in mind. Lu said that these singers sing with a "polyphonic concept".

Lu cites two cases of the former (that is, with polyphonic phenomena only): the first is a group-singing part of the "clapping-hands singing party" of the Tao, an aboriginal ethnic group of Taiwan. From an acoustic perspective, these singers' conception of a song is close to a melodic contour; however, in order to accommodate individual differences in vocal range, the society allows singers to choose their own starting pitch, creating a multi-part effect. In other words, the melodic contour of the song is the common ground, but different starting pitches create a multi-part acoustic effect. Since differences of intervals and rhythms among multiple parts are not considered, this polyphony is simply an acoustic phenomenon, rather than a concept of the singers or the entire group.

A similar situation can be heard on a recording of the SaySiyat tribe, another ethnic minority group in Taiwan, made by the Japanese ethnomusicologist Takatomo Kurosawa in 1943. Singing in parallel fourths, a method highly appreciated by Kurosawa, is presented on the recording, but Lu Yu-hsiu questioned this; the method could no longer be found in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. After hearing this early recording, singers from the tribe concluded that the recording participants had an intonation problem. Besides, their language has no term to describe different vocal parts. More instances of parallel fourths, also judged polyphonic, are found on later recordings of the same song by other ethnomusicologists, but further research into these recordings reveals that some scholars have considered them polyphonic, while others have adjudged them monophonic. More analysis was made of the recordings of the song performed by individual singers; each of them had the same melody. All evidence suggests that

²⁸ Lu Yu-hsiu and Sun Chun-yen, "Faces of the Tradition - The Transmission of Musical Form and the Conceptualization of Tradition among Taiwanese Aborigines," *Zhishan* 2, 2007, 21-42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

the recording done by Kurosawa was an incidental case, not a musical concept of that tribe.

As to the second polyphonic concept, containing multi-part melodies and a different rhythm, many cases can be provided. The Tsou are another ethnic minority group in Taiwan: when they sing during a *mayasvi* (war ceremony), high and low parts move independently in their own fixed melodies and rhythms in of parallel thirds, fourths, fifths or sixths. During practice, if either part is out of tune, corrections are made in order to achieve a perfect polyphonic effect.

"*Pasibutbut*", a song by the Bunun of Taiwan to pray for the millet harvest, is similar; with multiple melodies assigned to different singers. Differences in the intervals and timing make this multi-part singing particularly rich.

The *dage* ("grand song") of the Dong minority group of southwest China is another example. This song is performed by a large group of singers; most sing the lower part, while an experienced singing master takes the higher part. The master creates variations on the basis of the lower melody. When coming to the end of the song - a part called *lasangzi* (lit. "yelling") - the lower singers sing drones, allowing the higher singer to elaborate freely according to his or her taste. The experience and style of various singing masters results in diverse performances; each one may be different. A similar dynamic occurs among the Amis tribe of Taiwan, in which singers are entitled to create free counterpoint on the basis of the main singer's melody. Their singing techniques create different levels of richness in the polyphonic acoustics.³⁴ Even though this type of polyphony lacks a fixed form, the polyphonic concept or phenomenon does exist in the mind of the group.

Polyphony in pipe-smoking events

In terms of the identification criteria and the concept or phenomenon mentioned above, should the multi-part polyphony in the response singing of Yi pipe-smoking events be considered simply a polyphonic phenomenon, or is it a polyphonic concept shared by the singers?

Response singing is an important technique in pipe-smoking events; it is feedback from listeners to the praise, overpraise or flirting of the main singer, though the response singers are not always skilled enough to give timely dialogic feedback. In general, however, listeners usually provide feedback to the main singer's lyrics. For example, in the *huadianer* part of the *baihua* section in the

³⁰ Ibid., 28-30.

³¹ Lu Yu-hsiu, *Music Culture of Formosa* (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music cbs., 2013), 95-101.

³² Ibid., 82-88.

³³ Liu Yahu, ed., *Sound from Heaven: Grand Song of Dong Group* (Harbin: Heilongjiang People's cbs., 2005), 96-97.

³⁴ Lu Yu-hsiu and Kao Shu-chuan, *Searching for Polyphony. Recollecting the Lost Old Songs of Taitung Amis* (3 CDs+Booklet). (Miaoli: Miaoli Cultural Studio, 2013).

haicai melodic passage of the recorded example (featuring the male singer Shi Wanheng and the female singers Li Huaixiu, Shi Yufen and Shi Guiying). The male singer sings, "At first glance, I see a pretty girl. At second glance I see a watery face³⁶ with snow-white cream on it. What mother raised a girl with such a pretty face? Come here and let me take a closer look" (Example 1, measures 5-13). Pipe-smoking events are social activities for young men and women; all the listeners pay close attention to what the main singer says in the lyrics and provide feedback. Thus, the words "let me take a closer look" will definitely invite feedback from female listeners: in example 1, the two female singers respond to the male singer's praise (Example 1, measures 12-14, the lower part in small notes). One sings: "That's a lie!" while the other sings, "oh, see how it scares you!" The male singer responds with, "What kind words the lady has said!"

The game of response usually appears when the main singer expresses himself in a way similar to "flirting". For example, when the main male singer sings, "Come and let me take a closer look", female singers are definitely going to respond. In her master's thesis, "A Study of *Haicai* Melodic Passages among the Yi in Jianshui County", Yan Ping mentions that response singing usually appears during the latter part of the solo singing, indicating that the response only appears when the main singer has reached a certain stage in his or her performance. In practice, the second part appears when the main singer begins to praise or flirt, which tends to occur at a relatively fixed (though not absolute) point. Further, the direction of the response melody usually moves independently of that of the main singer. In short: the polyphony is a phenomenon intentionally created by both sides (Examples 1 and 2).

In other words, both singing parties have their own melodies. At the same time, this type of song does not have a very steady rhythm: drawls in free tempo are common, and on-beat rhythms can only be found in *huadianer* parts. However, the rhythm returns to a freer style when progressing to response singing. Though a certain rhythmic relationship seems to exist between the two melodic lines in Examples 1 and 2, this is merely a descriptive notation of a single performance. In the next performance, the response singer might respond to different words of the main singer's lyrics, and the free variations they create would lead somewhere else, changing both the rhythmic and melodic relationship of the two parts. In other words, the structure of the two voice parts, main and response, is neither fixed nor unchangeable. It complies to rules, but with considerable flexibilities. It is more than a phenomenon, but less than a well-considered structural concept. Polyphonic phenomena and concepts do exist in the melody of main and response singing in pipe-smoking events, but the combination of the two parts is more free. In comparison with strictly structured polyphony, Yi's response singing lacks the rules that regulate rhythmic and pitch interactions between voices.

³⁵ Zhang Xingrong, *The Peak - A documentary of the original music of Yunnan Ethnic Groups* (10 discs). (Kunming: Yunnan Minzu Wenhua (Ethnomusicological) Audio & Video cbs, 2004). Disc 1- the Yi Group (1), Track18, see also Example 1.

³⁶ The epithet "watery" in Chinese is synonymous with "attractive" or "pretty". Someone who has a "watery" face possesses an attractive face.

Lyrics are integral to the response polyphony

Polyphony in response singing in pipe-smoking events is a progressive phenomenon, made up of the interaction between the melodic lines of the main and response singers. The lyrics develop in relatively (but not absolutely) fixed melodic and rhythmic movements. Even though both polyphonic phenomena and concepts can be observed, this type of polyphony – relatively simple, not continuous and with no fixed forms – does not meet the criteria of strict polyphony, as defined by Simha Arom.

According to Yang Minkang, a leading researcher of ethnic minority music at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, many ethnic minorities in Yunnan are influenced by Christianity; they sing hymns in church. However, Christians of the Miao group in central Yunnan easily manage multi-part polyphonic singing, while Yi Christians in the region only sing monophonically.³⁷ Yang also mentioned in his article “New Variations on the Christian Ceremonial Music of Yunnan’s Ethnic Minorities” that the hymnals of the Miao and Lisu groups include scores for multi-part music, but Yi hymnals have only monophonic scores.³⁸ In traditional songs, multiple parts are assigned to different pitch intervals; when they sing hymns instead of traditional songs, the same singing method is kept and applied.

On the contrary, for the Yi group in Honghe County, the polyphony created by response singing is a melodic form of language. Interactions through lyrics are of more concern than the acoustic effects of melody and rhythm created by different frequencies and rhythmic overlapping. *Haicai* melody is popular in southern Yunnan, not in central Yunnan, where Christian religious music was investigated by Mr. Yang Minkang. However, Christianity is the religion of choice for some Yi people in southern Yunnan. When they sing hymns in the *haicai* form, the traditional praise and flirting are replaced with lyrics praising God’s grace. Since the dialogic form of response singing is no longer needed, the polyphony will never appear in hymns.

Conclusions

Impacted by factors like the change of social pattern, gender equality, and entertainment diversification, singing environment and the functions of pipe-smoking events no longer exist. These traditional social activities for young people are now disappearing, and the practice of dialogic respectively response singing between men and women is becoming rare. The music of southern Yunnan, once well-known to the public in China, is now threatened with extinction.

While not categorized as polyphony in the strict sense, with well-arranged melodies, intervals, and rhythm metrics, the response singing of pipe-smoking events nevertheless exhibits polyphony, both as a phenomenon and as a concept.

³⁷ Email exchanged on March 3 and 23, 2015.

³⁸ Yang Minkang, “New Variations on the Christian Ceremonial Music of Yunnan’s Ethnic Minorities”, *Religious Cultures of the World* 5 (2001): 42-43.

The formation of a polyphonic concept comes from the dialogic way of singing through lyrics Miao, a precious cultural heritage inherited from the ancestors of the modern Yi. In 2006, the *haicai* melodic passage was included in the first list of China's intangible cultural heritage.³⁹ With the support of national policy and activity we hope this type of music, with its polyphonic concept, can be passed on for generations to come.

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³⁹ Website: "Intangible Cultural Heritage in China", National List 062, *Haicai* Melody of the Yi Group: http://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/12481/. Accessed on December 12, 2020.

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