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Tibetan Guozhuang in Diqing Autonomous Prefecture: A Comparative Musical Analysis

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Tibetan Guozhuang in Diqing Autonomous Prefecture: A Comparative Musical Analysis

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The song and dance traditions of the Tibetan peoples of Diqing Prefecture are numerous and varied. Of these traditions, Guozhuang is cited as one of the oldest and most centrally traditional pieces of folk heritage. However, Guozhuang varies even within Diqing Prefecture. This paper addresses the basic form and structure of Guozhuang as well as variations between Benzilan and Shangri-la Guozhuang, two places separated not only by geographical distance but also the encroachment of development on traditional culture.

**Introduction**

There are many different kinds of Diqing Tibetan folksong, from love songs and drinking songs to the group festival dances of Guozhuang and Xianzi. However, despite the richness of this tradition, very little formal ethnomusicological study has been directed toward Tibetan folksong. Furthermore, as the rapid development initiated by Deng Xiaoping as Reform and Opening in the 1980s reaches even the remote areas of Diqing, traditional Tibetan folk culture is being lost. Younger generations have less and less exposure to traditional culture and are more interested in modern, global culture.

As a result, my objective in conducting this study was two-fold: firstly, to apply ethnomusicological field methods including music dictation and analysis to Diqing Guozhuang, and secondly, to raise awareness among

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2. Shen Meili, interview by author, 12 November 2012. Thangka Painting Center, Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
Western scholars of the complex, invaluable musical traditions that exist in Diqing and are quickly disappearing.

This study was conducted primarily via field recordings at Tibetan festivals and interviews with local folk music experts. I attended a wedding in Dinuo village and a house-dedicating ceremony in Trinyi village, both within 25 kilometers of Shangri-la. I also attended a house-dedicating ceremony in Benzilan, 80.5 kilometers to the northwest of Shangri-la. At each of these festivals I collected extensive recordings of group dancing and singing in the Guozhuang style. Based upon these recordings, I created sound maps of each recording indicating tempo, repetition, and antiphonal alternation, followed by dictation of many of the songs using Western five-line staff notation. I then used these sound maps and sheet music to trace patterns universal to the three samples of Guozhuang, as well as to analyze the differences present between the three musical events. Finally, I aligned my musical findings with information gathered through interviews and research about local Guozhuang as well as local development.

Based upon my findings, while there are many characteristics that unify Diqing Guozhuang as a tradition, there are also many differentiating features between different locations. Moreover, these differences are as much due to geographical separation as to factors of development—that is, how much each region has been affected by economic development, particularly in the area of tourism, over the last three decades.

**Guozhuang: History and Characteristics**
Guozhuang, a transliteration of Tibetan words “guo,” meaning “circle,” and “zhuo,” meaning “dance,” can be most broadly defined as a joyful dance performed on festive occasions in a large circle without instrumental accompaniment. It is considered one of the oldest Tibetan musical traditions. In Sagya County’s “Record of the Tibetan Ruler’s Subjects,” the author mentions, “all the subjects sing songs, happily dance the ‘zhuo’ dance, and play flourishing musical instruments, all of which is hardly interrupted. Every day it goes like this.” Additionally, according to Tibetan legend, when Tang Dynasty Princess Wen Cheng came to Tibet and married King Songtsen Gampo in 641 A.D., she danced Guozhuang with the common people every night.

According to local experts, Guozhuang is a group dance in which men and women sing to each other, sometimes asking and answering questions. The song lyrics concern life and human experience and are often very moving.

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4 Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Cultural Center and the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Center for Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage, 迪庆锅庄, trans. by the author (Kunming: Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, 2010), 1:1.
5 Haiyin Chuan, interview by author, 9 November 2012. Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
6 Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Cultural Center and the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Center for Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage, 迪庆锅庄, 1:1.
7 Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Cultural Center and the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Center for Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage, 迪庆锅庄, 1:1.
Moreover, Guozhuang is a musical tradition that is incredibly diverse and varied: Tibetans living in Xinjiang dance differently than those living in Tibet, and even within Tibet farmers and nomads have different musical styles. Concerning Diqing Guozhuang, it was frequently stated that Shangri-la Guozhuang lacks history and has changed over time, whereas Benzilan Guozhuang is authentic.

Shangri-la Guozhuang

I attended two family festivals in Shangri-la County: a wedding and a house building celebration. Each was a three-day festival that I attended on the second day. I was present at both festivals for the afternoon meal and then returned in the evening for a second meal and to observe the singing and dancing.

Sample One: Wedding in Dinuo Village, Shangri-la County, Diqing Prefecture

Context: Setting, Costume and Participation

The setting of this first example of Diqing Guozhuang was the wedding of two Potatso National Park employees. Dancing began after the evening meal at around 8pm. Dancers gathered into two lines in a large room located on the second floor of the bride and groom’s new house, moving in a clockwise direction around the house’s central pillar. The room also contained two stoves surrounded by benches in one corner as well as seating.

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9 Dunli Yangtai and Tasi Xidong, interview by author, 19 November 2012. Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording. [Entire paragraph from this source]
at intervals along the walls. This configuration facilitated the movement of
dancers in and out of the dance, which happened frequently.  

While the bride and groom did not participate in the dancing and
instead remained downstairs to drink beer with most of their peers (largely
Potatso employees), the age demographic of the dancers was still about one-
half young or middle-aged people. The rest of the dancers were elderly.
Dancer’s costumes ranged from traditional to contemporary. One elderly man
wore a tall, cylindrical silk hat with fur trim, a long silk overcoat, and ornate
boots. He also carried a dagger at his waist. Many of the middle-aged men
wore wide-brimmed hats, modern winter coats and jeans, while the younger
men were dressed entirely in modern clothing, from their sneakers to their
jeans and coats.  

The women dancers, on the other hand, were all dressed to some
degree in traditional costume. They wore long black pants or skirts with long
aprons over top: blue aprons indicated that the wearer was married, while
white aprons indicated that the wearer was single. Blue aprons significantly
outnumbered white aprons. Some of the women wore patterned vests,
underneath the back of which hung single, long pink tassels. Most of the
women wore modern puffy down vests and coats. All of the women wore hot
pink, donut-shaped head dresses or hot pink turbans, all over fur caps. 

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10 Appendix 4, Image 1
11 Appendix 4, Image 2
12 Appendix 4, Image 3
Though most women danced together in the same line, there were men interspersed in the women’s line. Dancers held on to each other by grasping the back of their neighbor’s jacket or by holding hands or placing an arm around his or her neighbor’s waist. Refreshments including beer, fruit and sunflower seeds were periodically offered to the dancers. While one group sang and danced, the other group remained stationary. The dances all involved regular, steady footfalls that created an even tempo and regulated the direction and shape of the song. When the first group finished a phrase, they stopped dancing and after a pause the other group took two initial dance steps before beginning to sing as well as dance. Because of this gap between the two groups of dancers there was always a break in rhythm and tempo. There was no instrumental accompaniment.

Musical Analysis

Overarching Themes

Aurally, this sample of Guozhuang proved difficult to analyze. For example, the men sang much louder and with more gusto than the women; combined with the fact that the women’s dance line also contained many men, this made it difficult to determine on the recording when one group’s phrase ended and the other began. Additionally, melodic lines were rarely unified and often became confused. On several occasions, the performance fell apart all together (followed by much laughter from the participants).

13 Appendix 4, Image 4
Because of these factors, both the sound map and the dictations from this wedding are vague and incomplete.\textsuperscript{14} In terms of the sound map, without a clear indication of when which group was singing it was difficult to trace patterns such as the number of repeats of a particular song, which group started which song and at what times, and so forth. This was also impacted by disagreements among the performers concerning the melody, as this made it difficult to determine when one song ended and the next began. In terms of dictation, disagreement among the performers as to the shape of the melodic line and especially as to the key or pitches to be sung created great difficulties in dictation. As a result, I resorted to simply dictating the rhythms (without pitch indication) of many of the songs.\textsuperscript{14} Additionally, though there were several instances in which the women performers sang in harmony with their male counterparts, the unclear recording proved impossible to dictate and analyze this harmony.

Still, several distinguishing and unifying characteristics emerged from observations at the wedding and from analysis of recordings made at the time. For instance, this Guozhuang dance was long in duration. It began just before we arrived but continued long after we left (circumstances made us feel the need to leave before the festival had ended). Several guests told me that it could even last through the night. Overarching structure provides another unifying characteristic: the participants would choose one song to

\textsuperscript{14} Appendix 1
sing which would be passed antiphonally between the two groups. While one
group danced and sang, the other was still and quiet.

For several of the songs, after singing at the original tempo for multiple
rounds, one group would sing a faster version of the song to a different, faster
dance. In these cases, it was clear that the initial song and the faster song
were related melodically; unfortunately, due to the quality of the singing and
of the recording, it was difficult to make direct comparisons between the two.
After each group sang this faster song once, another song was sung at the
slower tempo to the original dance. However, this next song was not always
a new song: sometimes, it was simply the original song at the slower tempo
again.

Though, again, the informality and inaccuracy of performance in Dinuo
Village made dictation and analysis difficult, the songs contain several
theoretical and especially rhythmic characteristics that can be addressed.
Every song was sung in the minor pentatonic scale, primarily centered on do
(unless otherwise indicated, the relationship of tonics between different songs
is not addressed as it varied arbitrarily). Within each of the slower songs, the
melody can be separated into two or three phrases, each of which end on do,
often as an extended, dotted half note. Additionally, the melodic line in most
of the songs returns to this do via a leading te. The slower songs all have
duration of 16 to 20 footfalls, where the average dance tempo is 45 beats per
minute; faster songs have a duration of 36 to 50 footfalls at 90 to 100 beats per minute.\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Pentatonic_Scale}
\caption{The Pentatonic Scale. \textit{Me} is a minor third above \textit{do}, \textit{fa} a perfect fourth above, \textit{sol} a perfect fifth above and \textit{te} a whole step below \textit{do}. \textit{Sol} and \textit{te} are often used to reinforce tonal center (\textit{do}).}
\end{figure}

\textit{Melodic and Rhythmic Unity}

For a deeper understanding of this particular performance of Guozhuang, I have selected two sets of comparative analyses to make: one, a melodic analysis of the slow and fast versions of a particular song; and the other a rhythmic overview of all recorded songs.

The slow version of the analyzed song begins at 11:00 on Recording 1. Its dictation in entirety can be found in Appendix One. Though the first four steps of this song are obscured melodically by an undefined tonal center, measures three and four reveal the pattern already discussed: a phrase ending in an extended \textit{do}, lead to by \textit{te}. This first phrase is then followed by two parallel phrases, whose shared melodic skeleton is as such:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Skeletal_Melodic_Dictation}
\caption{Skeletal Melodic Dictation of Dinuo Village Guozhuang, 11:00. G is \textit{do}.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{15} Appendix 1
This skeleton demonstrates both the centrality of do as the initial and final pitch, as well as the penultimate leading te. It also illustrates how repetition is utilized within songs, as the two phrases are similar enough to enable such a skeletal dictation. This also points to the ways in which many of the songs are ornamented: basic melodic lines, though repeated, contain different leading tones and ornamental rhythms.

As described earlier, after this slow melody is passed back and forth between the performing groups several times, one group presents a similar tune at a faster tempo to a livelier dance. For this particular song, this begins at 20:10 on Recording 1. Here, this faster song shares the slower song’s emphasis on do as well as on sol. The most notable similarity lies in the penultimate measure and final downbeat:

The final measures of the last two phrases, slow version:

The final measures of the last two phrases, fast version:

Illustration 3: Comparative Melodic endings, 11:00 and 20:10.16

All four phrases begin on me, peak on sol, and lead to the downbeat double eighth-note do via a sixteenth note te. In this way, the fast song is aurally connected to its slower predecessor.

Rhythmically, all of the songs recorded at this first wedding in Dinuo Village share an affinity for dotted and tied rhythms. The following two

16 Recording 1: Guozhuang, Wedding in Dinuo Village, November 5th, 2012
rhythmic excerpts, taken from two different songs at 30:25 and 35:46 of Recording 1, respectively, represent the rhythmic unity of the song series:

Illustration 4: Rhythmic Comparisons from Dinuo Village. Though from different songs, these excerpts possess strikingly similar placements of tied down beats (bars two and four), dotted rhythms (bars one and three), and pickup sixteenth notes (bars one, three and four).

Thus, this example of Dinuo Village’s Guozhuang demonstrates several overarching stylistic elements: repeated antiphonal slow songs followed by closely related fast songs; central do led to by te; division of songs into two phrases, ending in do; and rhythmic affinity for tied and dotted rhythms. Still, the disorganization of performance made it difficult to make deeply convincing conclusions about the nature of this Guozhuang. This in itself—disagreements about song style, order, tonic pitch—is an important distinguishing factor of Dinuo’s Guozhuang, important in comparison with Trinyi Village and Benzilan Guozhuang.

Shangri-la Guozhuang, Sample 2: House Building Celebration, Trinyi Village, Shangri-la County, Diqing Prefecture

Context: Setting, Costume and Participation

17 Recording 1: Guozhuang, Wedding in Dinuo Village, November 5th, 2012
The setting of this second example of Diqing Guozhuang was the dedication of a new house in Trinyi Village, about five kilometers outside downtown Shangri-la. I arrived after the dancing had begun, at about 8pm. Dancers again gathered into two lines in a large room on the second floor of the year-old house, moving in a clockwise direction around the house’s central pillar. The room was almost identical to the setting of the wedding, containing two stoves surrounded by benches in one corner, as well as seating at intervals along the walls.\textsuperscript{18} Again, this facilitated the frequent movement of dancers in and out of the dance. The most striking difference between this room and the setting of Dinuo Village’s Guozhuang was a large flat-screen television located in the corner adjacent to the stoves.\textsuperscript{19} For most of the night, this television played Han dramas and commercials, its sound interspersing with the Guozhuang singing.

The dancers were again a mix of the elderly, the middle-aged and the young. Dancer’s costumes ranged from traditional to contemporary. Most of the middle-aged and elderly women participants wore long white or blue aprons (blue indicating a married woman, white a single woman), maroon vests with gold trim around the neck and the right shoulder, and hot pink headdresses, some over white-trimmed fur caps. Many women wore contemporary down vests over top of this traditional costume. Some younger women were dressed in contemporary overcoats and jeans but still wore the pink headdress. Some women wore no traditional clothing at all. The men all

\textsuperscript{18} Appendix 4, Image 5
\textsuperscript{19} Appendix 4, Image 6
wore modern clothing, though some wore wide-brimmed hats or sported the long traditional overcoat and dagger under or among their contemporary garb. None of the children wore traditional dress.\footnote{Appendix 4, Image 5}

Both lines of dancers contained both men and women, though often the genders were clumped together into groups of four or five within each line. Many aspects were the same as or similar to Dinuo’s Guozhuang: dancers held on to each other by grasping the back of their neighbor’s jacket, or by holding hands or placing an arm around his or her neighbor’s waist. Refreshments including beer, fruit and sunflower seeds were periodically offered to the dancers. While one group sang and danced, the other group remained stationary.

The dances all consisted of steady footfalls that regulated the direction and shape of the song. When the first group finished a phrase, they stopped dancing and after a pause the other group, after two initial dance steps, took up the song and dance. Because of this gap between the two groups of dancers, there was always a break in rhythm and tempo. Again, there was no instrumental accompaniment.

Musical Analysis

The overarching structure and style of Trinyi Guozhuang is very similar to Dinuo Guozhuang: songs were repeated antiphonally between the two groups, and after many repeats of one song at a slow tempo, a faster,
related song was song by each group (sometimes more than once by each group). Additionally, melodies were centered on do.

**Special Characteristics: Harmony**

Of special regard in this Guozhuang performance, however, is the strong, frequent presence of female harmony. Moreover, this recording is clear enough to dictate one of these instances of harmony. At 6:33 in Recording 2, one line of dancers introduces a new song. This song consists of three phrases, all of which end on a half note do; the last two phrases are identical. At 7:06, the other group of performers echoes this melody. However, by the second full measure a distinct female harmony becomes apparent. As it occurs in the first and second phrases (since the third is identical to the second) is as follows (men in red, women in black):

![Illustration 5: Harmony, Trinyi Guozhuang, 7:06. G is do.](image)

The half note rests in the female line in bars four and eight indicate an inability to correctly discern pitch for dictation and not an actual rest.

The female harmony line also follows the minor pentatonic scale with the same key (same do) as the men. Additionally, the harmony shows a strong

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preference for perfect fourths and fifths: all but two instances (the third note in bars four and seven, which are major thirds between B flat and D) are fourths and fifths. This creates an open sense of harmony, in which the listener is less than sure of two different parts as the fourths and fifths sound so similar to octaves and unison. Further recordings and analysis would yield interesting insights into harmony, its formation and its purpose in Trinyi Guozhuang.

**Benzilan Guozhuang: A House Building Celebration**

*Context: Setting, Costume and Participation*

At this festival (again, at which I was present for the second of three days), there were two sets of group dances: one by the elderly in the afternoon and another by the young people in the evening. Shen Meili, my host, told me that the afternoon dancing was Guozhuang while the evening dancing—accompanied by a stringed instrument—was Xianzi. While the Xianzi is outside the scope of this paper, its clarity and complexity was remarkable and worth further study.

As mentioned, this Guozhuang took place in the afternoon and was performed primarily by elderly members of the family and community. Dancers gathered in one large circle on the first floor of the new house, moving in a clockwise direction around the house’s central pillar. Whereas the central pillar in both Shangri-la area houses was a massive circular column (about two feet in diameter), the pillar in Benzilan was a small square pillar, about eight inches by eight inches, with richly painted carvings.
adorning the top. On a table adjacent to this pillar (and also in the middle of
the circle of dancers) sat several bottles of soda, fried cheese, fruits, sweet
breads and large vases of red artificial flowers.22 The room also contained
benches lining the walls and small tables upon which snacks such as sweet
breads, fried cheese, sunflower seeds and candy, as well as sodas and beer,
were arrayed.

While most of the dancers were older (age 50 or older), there were also
several middle-aged and one or two young (20-30 years of age) dancers. About
half of the dancers were men and the other half women. The circle was
segregated into two groups, one of each gender, and it was by these two
groups that songs were sung antiphonally. However, all of the dancers danced
the entire time, so that there was never a gap in the tempo created by the
dancer’s steps.

For the most part, dancers were dressed in traditional clothing. The
women wore black pants and shoes, mid-calf length black or dark blue
pleated aprons featuring borders of pale sky blue with pieces of dark blue or
many-colored striped fabric underneath in back. They also wore maroon vests
with gold rickrack trim around the collar and sleeves, with turquoise long-
sleeved blouses underneath. Even where these outfits incorporated modern
elements, the women maintained this turquoise and red color scheme. The
women’s hair was braided into long pleats, into which were incorporated
brightly colored strings, one color for each braid segment. Their hair was

22 Appendix 4, Image 7
then coiled around brightly colored knit caps on top of their heads. Most women also wore turquoise earrings and a turquoise ring. Several held prayer beads or wore them around her neck. The few middle-aged and young women were entirely dressed in contemporary clothing.

The men were also largely dressed in traditional clothing. Several wore white or maroon tunics, and several had the long traditional overcoat tied at their waist with two sashes hanging down in back. Many carried daggers. One man, the father of the new house owner, wore an ornate belt decorated with turquoise and red stones. Many carried prayer beads, and one man wore the tall, cylindrical silk hat with fur trim as seen in Dinuo Village. A few men wore all-contemporary dress, though some still sported wide-brimmed hats.

Unlike in Dinuo and Trinyi villages, I arrived and started recording before the Guozhuang began. Additionally, this Benzilan sample of Guozhuang was incredibly organized and orderly, unlike the performances I observed in the first two villages. As a result, I was able to make a more detailed sound map and more thorough dictations, allowing for more in-depth musical analysis.

Musical Analysis

Overarching Structure

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23 Appendix 4, Image 7
24 Appendix 4, Image 8
25 Appendix 3
The Guozhuang began with the men singing a slow, drone-like melody without dance accompaniment. This melody had no strict tempo. After a time, the women echoed this long, slow melody. Interestingly, while the men sang in C pentatonic minor, the women echoed the song in G pentatonic minor.

Next, the men began a new song at a slow yet discernable tempo. This they sang in G pentatonic minor. Here, too, dancing began. The women echoed the song in response, but in C pentatonic minor. The song was passed back and forth in a similar manner until, as the women sang the melody, the men joined in and they both finished the tune together. This ended the song cycle. In total, the song was sung 16 times; throughout, the key difference between the two sexes was maintained, though both drifted sharp so that the women eventually sang in C# and the men in F#. Strikingly, though, on the 14th repeat the women sang in F# as the men had done prior. After this, the men continued to sing in F# as well and finally, the women sang in F# on the final round in which the men joined in.\textsuperscript{26} Perhaps, then, the women changing to the men’s key signaled the end of the dance. The average tempo was 46 beats per minute, as marked by footfalls.

These structural patterns are the same for each subsequent song, though no other song has a similar difference in key between the male and female groups. All songs were sung in a minor pentatonic key. In total, I recorded seven songs (after which my recording device ran out of battery).

\textsuperscript{26} Appendix 3
Each song was begun by one gender and then passed back and forth between the two until the gender that started the song joined in with the opposite group halfway through a final rendition of the melody. While there were also more dominant and less dominant voices in Dinuo and Trinyi, it was especially clear in Benzilan that certain individuals started and took charge of the songs: each song began with a lone voice soon joined by others, and at points it was clear that that one voice (usually elderly) was leading the singers via louder, emphatic singing. Additionally, the two groups alternated choosing and initiating the song: the men began the first, third, fifth and seventh songs while the women initiated the second, fourth and sixth songs. The tempo of the songs ranged between 42 and 55 beats per minute; there were no faster-paced, Coda-like songs as there were in Dinuo and Trinyi villages. Each song was repeated 10 to 18 times, discounting the last song, which I was not able to record in its entirety. (I recorded nine repetitions).

Melodic Themes

Overall, all of the songs shared several melodic characteristics. For instance, every melody moved upwards from its starting pitch, peaked at a high note and then gradually descended to the starting note (usually do). This happened both within individual phrases and across the entire melodic structure of each song.

As mentioned, most of the songs began and ended on do. Do is also an anchor throughout the songs, with the melody frequently returning to the

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27 Appendix 3
tonic. By reoccurring frequently in this way, do creates contrast with the portions of the phrases and songs that ascend to their peak pitches, momentarily departing from central do. When songs begin on sol instead of do, sol is also used as an anchoring pitch.

The following is an excerpt from Benzilan Guozhuang in which these melodic characteristics are highlighted. Green arrows indicate phrase peaks, red arrows mark the overall melodic peak, and blue lines suggest phrase separation. The prevalence of do (in this case, E) is marked by yellow underline. Additionally, in this case, each peak pitch is returned to after its initial sounding before the melody descends again to E/do.

![Illustration 6: Benzilan Guozhuang, Recording 3, 27:21. E is do.](image)

**Rhythmic Themes**

Rhythmically, like the Dinuo and Trinyi Guozhuang, this Benzilan Guozhuang is marked by ample syncopation, such as the following selected

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from a number of different songs:

As the above excerpts demonstrate, the rhythm of this sample of Benzilan Guozhuang does not often have straight rhythms but instead is characterized by ties and dotted rhythms. These rhythms have the effect of obscuring the melodic downbeat while the downbeat created by the performers’ footfalls remains ever-present throughout the dance. The melodic implications of these rhythms are discussed along with embellishments below.

**Embellishments and a Special Case of Pitch Center**

Through repeated listenings and comparisons, each song within a performance of Guozhuang can be reduced to its basic, skeletal elements. Based upon this skeletal melody, the embellishments and alterations utilized in performance can be analyzed. Furthermore, as described in my analysis of Dinuo Village’s Guozhuang, as a song within a performance of Guozhuang is passed back and forth between the performers, it undergoes subtle changes of melody and rhythm that result in slight variations within each song. The clarity and organization of the Benzilan Guozhuang made it an ideal sample
for analyzing both overall embellishment structure and for making comparisons between the repetitive performances.

I have chosen the second song from the festival, beginning on Recording 3 at 13:19, for this analysis. My own interpretation of the basic, skeletal melody of this song, followed by the first rendition by the men and the second by the women are as follows (since the women started the song, their first performance was unclear and difficult to transcribe accurately):
Skeletal Melody, Recording 3, 13:19 to 27:10:

Men, Recording 3, 14:10:

Women, Recording 3,

Illustration 8: Variations within Benzilan Guozhuang. Highlights are as follows:
- Blue: variations common to both excerpts
- Red: variations differing by excerpt
The embellishments highlighted here are not strictly gender-based: that is, the men often sing the rhythms that the women introduce in their line, while the women, too, sing that which is presented in the men’s line. These two particular excerpts (14:10 and 14:55) were selected largely for the exemplary amount of contrast between them. What is important to take note of, then, is the content and nature of the embellishments and how they affect the aural impact of the songs themselves.

These two excerpts contain both embellishments and variations: that is, there are melodic embellishments that are common to both excerpts (and to most of the song’s repetitions throughout the performance), and there are variations between the two excerpts that set them apart. Both bring to light important rhythmic and melodic characteristics of Benzilan Guozhuang.

All of the variations highlighted above involve rhythmic alteration. Here, pitches are stretched or shortened in length between performances or new leading pitches that occupy some of the skeletal pitch’s temporal space are added. When compared to the skeletal melodic structure of the song, these rhythmic alterations almost universally introduce syncopation and remove emphasis from the downbeat. This reflects the previous analysis of the prevalence of syncopation in Guozhuang: even when rhythms change between individual performances (red squares), the emphasis on syncopated rhythms is maintained, as the syncopation is either slightly altered in nature or location. For example, in measures 5 and 7 in the Women’s part, two eighth notes are replaced by a dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythm (red and blue
boxes). Syncopation is introduced. In measure 3 in both the Men’s and Women’s parts, syncopation is prevalent despite difference between the two: the Men’s part contains a dotted eighth-sixteenth, while the Women’s part obscures the second downbeat with a tie followed by a pair of sixteenth notes. In both parts, in contrast with the skeletal melody, the second downbeats of measures 4, 5, 9 and 15 as well as the fourth downbeats of measures 9 and 15 are obscured by syncopation (blue squares).

Pitch variation through embellishment is also significant in this song. Unlike the rest of the Guozhuang songs recorded in Benzilan, this song begins on me rather than on do or sol. This results in do occurring only six times in the skeletal melody, creating an unclear tonal center. It is striking, then, that several of the added pitches in the Men’s and Women’s performances aurally point to tonic do. In measures 9 and 15 in both excerpts, the final beat becomes four sixteenth notes: fa, me, do, te. These four pitches, followed by the downbeat do in the next measure, firmly center the song in B pentatonic minor. Additionally, in measure 13 in both excerpts as well as in measures 8, 10 and 12 in the Women’s excerpt, do itself is added as an embellishing note. Added sol-te leading tones in measure 11 of the Women’s excerpt also point to (the added) do. In this way, embellishments and variations in this sample of Guozhuang both emphasize the importance of syncopation in the songs as well as aurally reinforce the tonic center.
Comparative Analysis: Benzilan and Shangri-la Guozhuang

“Every place has its own style of folk music.” Benzilan, Dinuo and Trinyi’s Guozhuang shared enough similarities to all be classified as Guozhuang: all were performed at important familial festivals, all were danced in clockwise circle, and all were sung in an antiphonal style by two groups of performers. All were danced and sung by at least a few performers dressed in traditional clothing, all allowed for dancers to move in and out of the circle, and all were interspersed with laughter by the participants—they were joyful dances. Musically, all three examples were sung in pentatonic minor and heavily emphasized syncopation. None had instrumental accompaniment.

Still, each example of Shangri-la Guozhuang differed slightly from the other, and both contrasted more significantly with the Benzilan example. Some of these differences arose from contrasting geographic locations, ethnic interactions, and lifestyles or livelihoods. These types of differences have been culturally constructive, resulting in contrasting yet equally vivid traditions. However, the rapid development of the past three decades as well as the growth of tourism have also created differences among these three examples of Guozhuang. These differences are especially pronounced.

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30 Shen Meili, interview by author, 12 November 2012. Thangka Painting Center, Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
between the Shangri-la and Benzilan performances because development has disproportionately impacted Shangri-la and its surrounding villages.

Constructive Cultural Divergence

Traveling the road from Shangri-la to Benzilan, many of the reasons for contrast between the culture of these two locations becomes apparent: the long road winds in and out of steep, forested mountains that soon give way to the brown, dry slopes that nestle Benzilan beside the swift Jinsha river. Shangri-la is located on a high, broad plateau where, historically, the Tibetan people’s livelihood came from herding yaks and cultivating barley; in Benzilan, isolated as it is among the mountains, traditional industry was based upon trade from the Tea Horse Caravan Trail. Additionally, about 40 percent of the population of Shangri-la country is Tibetan while the population of Deqin county (where Benzilan is located) is about 80 percent Tibetan. All of these factors affected stylistic aspects of Guozhuang in each of these places.

Over time, these factors have caused Guozhuang and its cultural context to grow and diversify, and as a result Benzilan and Shangri-la Guozhuang vividly offer their own unique contributions to Diqing Tibetan

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33 Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Cultural Center and the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Center for Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage, 迪庆锅庄 1:2.
culture as a whole. For example, the traditional costumes of Benzilan and Shangri-la are distinct in vibrant ways: while the women of Shangri-la wear long, smooth white or blue aprons and prefer bright pink plush headdresses, the women of Benzilan wear shorter, pleated blue aprons and decorate their long braids with brightly-colored tassels which they then proudly display wrapped around their caps. While the dancers in Shangri-la form two lines that align and overlap as they take turns dancing, the dancers in Benzilan maintain a closed circle and continuously dance as one group.

Musically, while the gender segregation of the vocal groups in Benzilan created a very clear aural contrast between the two, the mixing of genders within one performance group in Shangri-la allowed for harmonization between the male and female singers. Another difference between the two is seen in tempo and structure: the Benzilan Guozhuang kept a steady tempo and constant dance, while most of the Shangri-la songs finished with two repetitions of a faster song and dance. In these regards, the musical culture is different yet equally vibrant.

*Destructive Cultural Decay*

Unfortunately, a more in-depth comparative musical analysis of Benzilan and Shangri-la Guozhuang was seriously hindered by the destructive impact of globalization and development. As discussed previously, the performances recorded in Dinuo and Trinyi villages were disordered and unclear, with disagreements about pitch or key and frequent moments of confusion concerning which song was being performed or what should
happen next. This made it impossible to create the detailed sound map or set of melodic dictations that I was able to produce from the Benzilan recording, which was incredibly structured and clear. This loss of cultural memory in Shangri-la is a direct result of economic development in the area, as well as of a focus on Tibetan culture as a source of income via tourism.

Without a doubt, Diqing prefecture has experienced tremendous change in the past three decades. As with much of the rest of China, there has been a massive urban migration as the younger generation leaves family farms in search of more profitable occupation. Additionally, those children who are raised in Diqing attend public school where they must study in Mandarin rather than Tibetan and where traditional song and dance are not taught. Since folk music like Guozhuang is learned “from childhood” by listening to festival songs and studying with elders, this lack of education and establishment of a language barrier between generations effectively diminishes knowledge of Guozhuang. With globalization, too, young people have become more interested in pop music than in their own traditional culture.

Another influence that has transformed Shangri-la Guozhuang in particular is the importance of tourism in Diqing. Tourism has been the most

34 Shen Meili, interview by author, 12 November 2012. Thangka Painting Center, Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
35 Haiyin Chuan, interview by author, 9 November 2012. Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
36 Dunli Yangtai and Tasi Xidong, interview by author, 19 November 2012. Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
important industry in Diqing since 1998. Central to tourism in Diqing is the presentation of Tibetan culture as exotic and appealing, most blatantly demonstrated by the adoption in 2002 of the name Shangri-la for Zhongdian county and city after James Hilton’s novel *Lost Horizon*. While there has been significant investment in cultural preservation as a result, it is the preservation of a glamorized, essentialized culture intended to attract tourists. “Shangri-la Guozhuang is not real Guozhuang... it is both taken from outside places and it has changed. They choose the most beautiful songs from different areas and then display them in Shangri-la.” While these words describe Guozhuang as performed for tourists (often in Shangri-la old town) and not the familial celebrations I attended, it is certainly true that false, glamorized culture is being preserved at the cost of grassroots culture. At Triniy Village, the flatscreen television in the room with Guozhuang at one point ran a commercial which showed Tibetans in pristine, artificial costumes dancing on the open fields and plains, in sharp contrast to the dance being performed at the time. Thus both globalization and the exploitation of Tibetan culture for profit has caused the decay Guozhuang as songs have become confused and forgotten.

It should be noted that while the same forces of development and globalization are impacting Benzilan as well, it has thus far been a slower and

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40 Dunli Yangtai and Tasi Xidong, interview by author, 19 November 2012. Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
less significant process. Benzilan too has experienced significant out-migration of its younger generation; in fact, Shen Meili and her siblings have all moved to Shangri-la to find employment.41 Young people, too, have lost interest in traditional culture: while a number middle-aged and younger participants danced the Xianzi dance in the evening in Benzilan, many of the younger generation instead played drinking games together.

Furthermore, Benzilan is not the tourist hub that Shangri-la has become. Though it has a few hotels and hostels, it is primarily a stop for tourists on the way from Shangri-la to Deqin and not a location heavily advertised for its indigenous culture.42 Finally, it is only accessible by steep mountain roads in contrast Shangri-la, which boasts its own airport, and so modernizing and globalizing forces, especially tourists, have been slower to impact the area. This delayed impact of development is clearly seen in the performance of Benzilan Guozhuang: while the performers were mostly elderly and middle-aged guests and family members (and so the younger generation is neither learning nor carrying on the tradition), the songs were more accurately remembered and presented in a more organized fashion. Benzilan Guozhuang at this moment is still preserved as the “authentic” Guozhuang.43

Conclusion: Pressing Need for Study and Preservation

41 Shen Meili, interview by author, 12 November 2012. Thangka Painting Center, Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
43 Dunli Yangtai and Tasi Xidong, interview by author, 19 November 2012. Old Town Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, China, tape recording.
It is clear, then, that two separate factors set Shangri-la and Benzilan Guozhuang apart: on the one hand, the two regions possess historically different cultural characteristics, while on the other hand the imposition of economic development and tourism has impacted the different locations to different degrees. In light of this, the importance of preservation in both places cannot be overstated.

Several initiatives have already been set into motion in Diqing. As Guozhuang has been classified by the central Chinese government as a piece of intangible cultural heritage, it has become the focus of governmentally sponsored conservation projects.\(^4\) For another project, lead by anthropologist Gerald Roche, students from Qinghai Normal University have been traveling throughout Tibet recording folk songs.\(^5\) Still, considering the breadth and depth of Diqing Guozhuang (let alone Xianzi, Qingge, Jiuge or other types of songs), these studies fail to adequately represent or preserve the tradition. Not only do more recordings need to be made but also further study into the cultural context of these folk songs—why they are sung, who sings them, what significance they have to a community—needs to be conducted.

Finally, in order for Guozhuang to truly survive as an art form, it must be passed on to the next generation. At the moment, school curriculum in

\(^4\) Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Cultural Center and the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Center for Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage, 迪庆锅庄 1:1.

Shangri-la does not include classes on Tibetan culture. While introducing classroom curriculum would be challenging, smaller steps such as promoting educational tourism and encouraging elders to pass on their knowledge would be significant as well. Shen Meili’s sixteen-year-old son chose to dance the Guozhuang and the Xianzi in Benzilan because he enjoyed the dances, an enjoyment certainly influenced by his mother’s love of folk music. Only this kind of proactive preservation can protect Diqing Guozhuang from further decay.

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