

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DAI ETHNIC
CHARACTERISTICS IN FIVE MOVEMENT
PIANO SUITE IN *SCENES FROM*
XISHUANGBANNA BY XIA LIANG**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2025

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by

LIANG YIKENG

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts**

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed (LIANG YIKENG)

Date (4 March 2025)

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. Bibliography/ references are appended.

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**ANALISIS KRITIKAL CIRI-CIRI ETNIK DAI DALAM FIVE MOVEMENT
PIANO SUITE DALAM *SCENES FROM XISHUANGBANNA* OLEH XIA**

LIANG

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneroka integrasi ciri-ciri muzik etnik masyarakat Dai dalam komposisi Xia Liang, *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*, dalam konteks muzik piano Yunnan. Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk memberi analisis terperinci tentang bagaimana elemen muzik tradisional Dai diintegrasikan ke dalam komposisi piano kontemporari China. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah analisis muzik Barat dan Timur. Analisis muzik Barat, yang dipandu oleh Persichetti (1961) dan Kostka & Santa (2018), meneliti penggunaan harmoni kuartal dan quintal, mod Lydian, kromatisme, struktur ritma dan melodi. Untuk analisis muzik Timur, karya Zhang (2006) dan Xie & Xie (2012) menyediakan kerangka yang sesuai untuk menganalisis aplikasi ciri-ciri muzik Dai, seperti irama *San Ban* (tempo bebas), *San Du* (interval ketiga/3rd), dan meter campuran. Kaedah gabungan ini memudahkan analisis komprehensif terhadap struktur muzik, bahasa harmoni, corak irama, dan ciri-ciri melodi dalam komposisi *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa Xia Liang berjaya mengintegrasikan elemen muzik Dai ini, dengan menghasilkan komposisi yang mencerminkan keaslian muzik tradisional Dai serta gabungan inovatif tradisi muzik Timur dan Barat. Gabungan ini memperkayakan pengalaman pendengaran, memperlihatkan ciri-ciri ritma dan melodi yang kompleks dalam muzik Dai. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini meningkatkan pemahaman akademik tentang gaya muzik etnik Yunnan dalam komposisi piano, sekali gus menyumbang kepada pemeliharaan dan penghargaan warisan budaya yang pelbagai di Yunnan. Ia

juga menyediakan asas untuk penyelidikan masa depan mengenai gabungan elemen muzik etnik dalam muzik kontemporari China.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of Dai ethnic music characteristics in Xia Liang's composition, *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*, within the context of Yunnan piano music. The aim of this research is to provide a detailed analysis of how traditional Dai musical elements are incorporated into contemporary Chinese piano compositions. The study employs both Western and Eastern music analysis methods. Western music analysis, guided by Persichetti (1961) and Kostka & Santa (2018), examines the use of quartal and quintal harmonies, the Lydian mode, chromaticism, and rhythmic and melodic structure. For the Eastern music analysis, the works of Zhang (2006) and Xie & Xie (2012), presented a fitting framework to analyse the application of Dai music characteristics, such as *San Ban* (free tempo) rhythms, *San Du* (third interval/3rd), and mixed meters. These combined methods facilitated a comprehensive examination of the musical structure, harmonic language, rhythmic patterns, and melodic features in *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*. The results indicate that Xia Liang effectively integrates these Dai musical elements, creating a composition that reflects both the authenticity of traditional Dai music and the innovative blend of Eastern and Western musical traditions. This fusion enriches the auditory experience, showcasing the complex rhythmic and melodic characteristics of Dai music. In conclusion, the study enhances the academic understanding of Yunnan's ethnic music style in piano compositions, contributing to the preservation and appreciation of Yunnan's diverse cultural heritage. It also provides a foundation

for future research into the fusion of ethnic musical elements in contemporary Chinese music.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Introduction and Background

This research closely examines five movements from Xia Liang's composition, *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* composed in 1987 to analyse how musical elements from the Dai ethnic community and Western music elements are embedded within the compositions. By concentrating on these five movements, the research aims to uncover how Dai cultural elements are fused with Western musical methods to enrich the understanding of Yunnan piano music.

Yunnan Province, located in southwest China, is a place of rich cultural diversity. The province is home to around 25 ethnic communities, and each community has a distinctive musical tradition that has contributed to Yunnan's cultural heritage. The Dai ethnic community, whose musical practices will be researched in this thesis through Xia Liang's works are one of the 25 ethnic communities. Amidst this, Yunnan piano music has emerged as a unique genre that highlights a blend of Yunnan cultures and musical styles. This introduction chapter is divided into three parts, each exploring important aspects of Yunnan's music story, giving insights into the following three subtopics, namely: Yunnan piano music, Dai people and Prominent Yunnan Composers.

1.1.1 Yunnan piano music

Piano music, as one of the most important categories of Western music art, has developed for over three centuries (Dumlavwalla, 2019). Throughout its

evolution, it has experienced diverse adaptations, seamlessly integrating with various music genres across different eras of Western cultural evolution. This is evident in the incorporation of opera, dance drama, symphony, vocal music, and chamber music into the field of piano compositions, thereby attesting to its versatility as an art form. Dumlavwalla (2019) noted that distinct characteristics of piano music have manifested diversely across different countries. For instance, the Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff has been known to include rich harmonies in his piano compositions (Martyn, 2017). Argentine tango piano music features lively Argentinian rhythms, for example, Astor Piazzolla (Stepputat, 2024). Additionally, the piano compositions of Ludwig van Beethoven, a celebrated German composer, frequently showcase vigorous and impactful themes, demonstrating the strength and depth of German musical heritage (November, 2022).

Over the past century, elements from Western musical traditions have gradually found their way into the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Li, 2018). Chinese piano music composers have attempted to integrate diverse elements into their piano compositions while maintaining elements of Chinese nationalism in their works (Li, 2018; Van, 2018). The process of adapting Western piano music not only serves as a source of diverse material and inspiration for piano composition but also significantly amplifies the reach of the original musical content, fostering its dissemination to a wider audience.

Within the Yunnan province, many local composers have endeavoured to bridge Chinese and Western musical traditions, giving rise to piano compositions

that authentically portray the rich characteristics of local ethnic cultures in Yunnan (Deng, 2020; Gao, 2020; Mo, 2016). These musical works intricately weave together the melodies, rhythms, and themes of Yunnan's diverse ethnic groups with Western musical elements such as quartal and quintal harmonies, mixed meters, and polyphony. This genre not only enriches the musical scenery but also recapitulates the region's unique cultural characteristics. Its evolution over time embodies a harmonious integration of various ethnic sounds, rhythms, and themes. These elements often draw inspiration from the rich musical traditions of Yunnan's diverse ethnic groups, contributing to the region's unique musical style.

This musical style is now a crucial part of Yunnan's music, supported by composers like Zhu Jian'er, Chen Yong, Wang Jianzhong, and Chu Wanghua, who have created piano pieces representing Yunnan's musical heritage. For instance, research by Mo (2016) in his book *Popular Songs* delves into the analysis of Zhu Jian'er's adaptation of the Yunnan folk song *Flowing Creek* into *Prelude No. 2, "The Running Stream"* a piano solo piece. His research underscores the role of Western music adaptation to enrich the Yunnan piano music and its potential to introduce traditional Yunnan compositions to a broader audience.

Chen Yong's piano suite, *Sketches of Yi Mountain*, composed in 1987, exemplifies the trend of blending traditional ethnic musical elements with contemporary piano composition techniques. Rooted in a deep exploration of Yi ethnic folk music, the suite's five interconnected stories - *Duets on the Cliff*, *Yi Mountain's Carriage*, *Tales by the Firepit*, *Bonfire*, and *Foot Dance* - collectively

paint vivid portraits of the community's life (Deng, 2020). In 1958, Wang Jianzhong composed *Five Yunnan Folk Songs*, skilfully weaving together five distinct Yunnan ethnic folk tunes into a cohesive piano rendition, showcasing the multifaceted musical fabric of the Yunnan ethnic group (Deng, 2020). Similarly, Chu Wanghua's composition, *Guessing Tunes*, is an ingenious adaptation of a Yunnan Yi folk song. This piece exemplifies the composer's creativity in merging traditional motifs within piano music, offering a bridge between tradition and contemporary (Gao, 2020). These compositions showcase the fusion of Yunnan's ethnically rich culture with the creative genius of these composers. They provide compelling evidence of how Western and Chinese traditional elements can be seamlessly woven into Yunnan's vibrant musical culture.

The works of Xia Liang have also been researched for his Incorporation of ethnic elements. His composition *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* is often associated with capturing the ethnic musical essence of Yunnan, vividly reflect the unique attributes of Yunnan's ethnic music tradition. In his analysis, Ji (2016) elucidates on these compositions, noting their use of specialised creative techniques. In *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*, traditional Dai melodic motifs, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic structures are incorporated into the piano composition. These distinctive musical elements, deeply rooted in Yunnan's ethnic music tradition, include the use of pentatonic scales, intricate rhythmic variations, and emulating the sounds of traditional instrumentation. The composition and performance of these works serve as an authentic reflection of these nuanced and culturally rich elements, as they intricately capture the essence of Yunnan's diverse ethnic musical heritage. To create

music that truly embodies Yunnan's ethnic music, composers should have a deep understanding of this tradition, and performers should perceptually and rationally analyse the characteristics of Yunnan's ethnic music to convey the essence of the works effectively (Zhou, 2016). The piano compositions with strong ethnic characteristics in Yunnan Province, including specific traits that will be discussed in the following chapters, have not only played a significant role in advancing piano music in China but have also generated multiple artistic values (Huang, 2018).

While Xia Liang's compositions have been studied in the past, this present research attempts to present a fresh perspective on his works by incorporating qualitative data obtained through field research, including interviews and observations. This qualitative data provides an additional level of resources and perspectives that complement existing studies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of Xia Liang's works. Therefore, the research stands out by enriching the analysis with first-hand experiences and perspectives gathered through fieldwork, contributing to a deeper exploration of Xia Liang's compositions beyond existing literature.

1.1.2 Dai people

The Dai people are a transnational ethnic group distributed across countries like China, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. This connection is evident in their language, traditions, and social practices, which show similarities to those found in Southeast Asia, particularly the Tai ethnic groups (Zhang, 2006). In China, the Dai ethnic group has a long history, and its ancestors originated from the ancient

coastal regions of China, belonging to the Baiyue ethnic group (Xie & Xie, 2012). The community primarily inhabits Yunnan Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, as well as Gengma, Jinping and Menglian counties. This location, characterised by a lush landscape and a favourable climate, has profoundly influenced the community's way of life, from agriculture to religious practices (Wang, 2021). Additionally, there are smaller Dai populations in more than 30 counties with a population of 1.259 million (Yunnan Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

The Dai people are known for their Buddhist faith, specifically Theravada Buddhism, which plays a central role in their daily life and community organisation (Wang, 2021). Their religious practices, temples, and festivals reflect a deep spiritual connection to their environment and their faith. The most significant festival is the water-splashing festival, celebrated annually, marking the traditional Dai New Year. Believers spread water on others as a means of blessing and pray for a long lifespan. This festival showcases Dai family relations, but it also reflects their deep connection with nature, indicative of their primarily agricultural culture. This connection to nature will be further explored in the analysis of Xia Liang's five movements in Chapter 4.

A vital part of Yunnan's music is derived from the music of the Dai people who are known for their rich culture and lively traditions (Zhang, 2006, p246). Composers, such as Xia Liang, draw inspiration from these elements to infuse Dai culture into their music (Ji, 2016). The community's music, dance, and literature are

integral to their cultural expression. Traditional Dai music is rich in rhythm and melody, often accompanied by unique musical instruments such as the *Hulusi*/Gourd flute (葫蘆絲), a wind instrument with a gourd body, refer to Figure 1; the Elephant Foot Drum (象腳鼓), a large percussion instrument looks similar to the djembe, refer to Figure 2. The dance moves of the Dai people are usually slow, graceful, and elegant, often performed during festivals and celebrations (Ji, 2016). These musical and cultural characteristics are often present in compositions by prominent Yunnan composers as they reflect their intention to preserve their heritage in their music.



Figure 1 *Hulusi*/Gourd flute (Image taken by researcher)



Figure 2 Elephant Foot Drum (Image retrieved from <http://yn.people.com.cn/BIG5/n2/2022/0711/c372453-40032676.html>)

1.1.3 Prominent Yunnan composers

While this thesis is focused on the 5 movements *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* by Xia Liang, it is important to also highlight some of the other prominent Yunnan composers as it reveals how the music and tradition of Yunnan has inspired numerous other composers and not just Xia Liang. However, first a brief introduction of Xia Liang.

Xia Liang, a 70-year-old prominent Chinese composer, is of Han ethnicity. Despite not being from the Dai ethnic group, Xia Liang's compositions profoundly reflect Yunnan's diverse ethnic cultures, particularly the Dai people (Li & Fu, 2022). Born in Yiliang County, Yunnan Province, China, Xia Liang was inspired early on by Yunnan's rich cultural heritage and the unique sounds and rhythms of its ethnic music. He pursued formal music education at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, learning under celebrated professors like Ding Shande and Wang Jianzhong (Wu, 2022). His training in Western music composition techniques, combined with a deep understanding of traditional Dai music elements, enabled him to create a unique style that merges Western compositional methods with traditional Dai music.

To date, Xia Liang is one of the few composers who have incorporated Dai traditional music elements into piano compositions (Wu, 2022). Among such works, two stand out: Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* and Zhang Zhao's *Forest Meditation* from *Chinese Melodies* (Li, 2018). Xia Liang is particularly noted for integrating environmental and cultural aspects of Dai music into his work, offering a more comprehensive and innovative representation of this ethnic tradition (Zhang, 2019).

Xia Liang's compositions, renowned for their blend of Western and ethnic music elements, reflect his commitment to preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in China. His works, such as *Fantasy Concerto*, *Concerto for Large Pipe*, and *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*, showcase his skill in bridging traditional and contemporary styles (Wu, 2022). Specifically, *Scenes from*

Xishuangbanna highlights his ability to authentically capture Dai ethnic characteristics. Xia Liang's music has garnered acclaim both domestically and internationally, establishing him as a leading figure in contemporary Chinese classical music and a champion of Yunnan's cultural diversity. Chapter 4 will provide a detailed analyses of Xia Liang's creative works, exploring the intricacies of his compositions.

Besides Xia Liang, two other prominent composers require mention for their contribution in developing Yunnan's piano works. They are Zhang Zhao and Liu Xiaogeng. Their compositions serve as remarkable examples of how traditional music elements from various ethnic groups have been skilfully integrated into Western musical forms, creating captivating and culturally significant masterpieces. This section will briefly present the works of these two prominent Yunan composers.

Zhang Zhao, a 60-year-old composer from Honghe, Yunnan Province and belongs to the Hui ethnic group. His musical journey began at a young age, starting piano lessons at seven and formal music education at the Yunnan Arts School by 14. Zhang's passion for music led him to the Central University for Nationalities in 1984, where he pursued dual degrees in composition and piano, graduating in 1987 (Ma, 2021). Furthering his studies, he completed postgraduate composition studies at the Central Conservatory of Music in 1998. Currently, Zhang is a composition professor and graduate supervisor at the School of Music of the Central University for Nationalities. His compositions have earned him recognition, including the *New Original People World Chinese Music Award* in 1995 for *Mountain Evening* and the

second prize at the *2nd China Piano Music Golden Bell Award for Three Mountain Ballads of Southern Yunnan* (Ma, 2021). Zhang's works often reflect his ethnic heritage, notably *Three Mountain Ballads of Southern Yunnan*, composed in 1992. This piece beautifully captures the scenery, people, and cultural nuances of the Yi ethnic region, consisting of *Mountain Child*, *Mountain Moon*, and *Mountain Fire* (Ma, 2021).

Liu Xiaogeng, a 68-year-old composer from Luquan, Yunnan Province, has significantly influenced the region's music scene. Beginning his musical education in 1978 at Yunnan Arts University under Professor Zhao Kuanren, he focused on composition and continued his academic journey with advanced studies in polyphony at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music in 1982. His global exposure includes conducting studies in the United States in 1992 and participating in a year-long exchange program at the Asian Institute for Liturgical Music and Arts in the Philippines from 1996 to 1997. These experiences have deeply influenced his composition style and the way he blends Western elements with Yunnan's ethnic music (Zhou, 2015). Liu Xiaogeng's diverse body of work showcases this cultural synthesis. His piano compositions, such as *Sani Fantasia*, *Brother Facing the Sun*, *Love Song of Aguo*, and *Plateau of Dreamers*, integrate Western techniques with Yunnan's ethnic styles (Zhou, 2015). His choral works, including *A Nest of Sparrows*, *Love of Water*, and *Pounding Rice Song*, along with dance music like *Land and Moon in the Water*, further highlight his unique fusion of cultural influences (Li, 2020). Liu's distinctive approach adds a rich cultural depth to his compositions and

establishes him as a key figure in blending Eastern and Western musical traditions, alongside others like Xia Liang and Zhang Zhao.

The works of Zhang Zhao and Liu Xiaogeng represent a broad range of Yunnan's cultural elements, encompassing influences from the Dai, Yi, Hani, Bai and other ethnic groups inhabiting the region. As the number of piano and instrumental compositions rooted in traditional music elements continues to grow, there arises a pressing need for systematic analysis of these works. Through exploring the connections between Yunnan traditional music elements and Western composition techniques, scholars, educators and practitioners can better comprehend the profound cultural significance of these works, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and understanding which can lead to better performances of the compositions.

1.2 Research Focus

This research will focus on examining the five movements from Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* to explore the incorporation of Dai ethnic music elements in his compositions. The research also aims to show the fusion between Western musical elements with Eastern musical elements in Xia Ling's compositions to demonstrate the versatility in Xia Liang's piano works. While this piece serves as a significant example, it may not encompass the entirety of piano works incorporating Dai ethnic music elements. Therefore, the findings and conclusions drawn from this study should be interpreted within the context of this specific composition. Secondly, the analysis conducted in this study is based on the existing

music score and literature available up to the time of this research. Any future developments, such as new editions of the score or revisions by the composer, will not be accounted for in this study. Readers are advised to recognise this limitation when considering the relevance and applicability of the study's findings in the future. Lastly, due to the complexity of musical interpretation and the subjective nature of musical analysis, there may be varying interpretations of the musical elements and cultural connections presented in this study. While every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive analysis, readers should approach the findings with an awareness of the inherent subjectivity involved.

1.3 Problem Statement

Piano works that incorporate ethnic music styles from Yunnan Province exemplify a harmonious fusion of Chinese and Western cultures. However, there has been a noticeable lack of research regarding piano compositions in Yunnan Province, particularly those that prominently feature Dai ethnic music elements, which in turn has hindered piano learners from fully grasping the essence of these works and effectively conveying their cultural significance during performances (Li, 2018; Wu, 2022). Previous research has shown that there is limited exploration of the ethnic and cultural connotations within piano works, which in turn has impeded the broader dissemination of Yunnan's ethnic culture and stunted the holistic development of piano music in China (Wu, 2022). Recognising the significance of delving into the unique musical characteristics of piano compositions inspired by Yunnan's Dai ethnic traditions, this research strategically concentrates on five compositions from Xia Liang's, *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*. By focusing on a single composer's work,

this study aims to provide an in-depth and comprehensive analysis, with a specific emphasis on the integration of Dai ethnic elements into contemporary piano music. The research will closely examine how Xia Liang incorporates Dai ethnic motifs, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic structures into the five movements of *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* and fuses them with Western musical elements to create a unique blend of both cultures. The goal is to provide performers, readers, scholars and researchers with insights into effectively interpreting and conveying the fusion element of these pieces. This focused approach allows for a thorough exploration of the intricate relationship between traditional ethnic influences and modern piano composition, shedding light on the broader context of Yunnan's musical style.

The choice to focus on Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* stems from its depth in exploring the integration of Dai ethnic characteristics in Yunnan piano music. This composition acts as a reflection, capturing the delicate balance between traditional Dai musical elements and Western piano techniques. The study carefully examines all five pieces in the suite for a comprehensive view. This approach of delving into each composition of the suit facilitates a thorough exploration of the interplay between Dai ethnic characteristics and contemporary piano composition, enhancing our comprehension of this unique musical genre.

1.4 Research Objectives

In response to the observed gap in comprehensive academic discussion, this research aims to address the following objectives:

(i) To analyse the presence of Western musical elements like tonal structure, rhythm, harmony, and melody within the 5 movements of Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* to understand the presence of fusion in the compositions.

(ii) To examine how Xia Liang incorporates specific elements of traditional Dai music like melodic motifs, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic structures into the five movements of *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* to establish a fusion between Western piano music and Dai ethnic music.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions will address the above mentioned objectives:

(i) How does Xia Liang incorporate Western musical elements like tonal structure, rhythm, harmony, and melody within the 5 movements of Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* to understand the presence of fusion in the compositions?

(ii) In what way does Xia Liang incorporate specific elements of traditional Dai music like melodic motifs, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic structures into the five movements of *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* to establish a fusion between Western piano music and Dai ethnic music?

1.6 Significance

This study examines the crossroads of cultural heritage and modernity, delving into the intricate fusion of Dai ethnic music with contemporary piano composition in Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*. This investigation stands out for its blend of musical analysis along with qualitative data gathered through observations of Dai ethnic musical and traditional practices and interviews with select members of the Dai ethnic community. It unveils the complexities of blending traditional Dai music with modern compositional techniques, offering new perspectives in the understanding of musical evolution.

Furthermore, previous analyses of Xia Liang's compositions have largely overlooked the Western elements embedded in his work, failing to explore the integration of Western tonal, rhythmic, and harmonic techniques within the framework of Dai's musical characteristics (Liu, 2012; Zhuo, 2018). Notably, the theories and analytical frameworks established by Vincent Persichetti (1961), Kostka and Santa (2018) have not been adequately applied to understand the full scope of Xia Liang's compositional strategy and the cultural synthesis in his music. This oversight has left a gap in understanding how Western music theory intersects with traditional Dai elements in Xia Liang's compositions.

By dissecting Xia Liang's innovative blending of Dai music's distinctive qualities with modern compositional methods, this study not only bridges this

significant research gap but also enriches our comprehension of how cultural elements can be weaved into contemporary musical innovation. Moreover, by examining the incorporation of Dai ethnic elements into piano compositions, this research contributes vitally to preserving Dai's cultural heritage. The detailed analysis of the five compositions that uncovers the art of harmonising cultural tradition and modernity, will potentially provide younger composers with insights to innovate while respecting their roots.

Additionally, a critical limitation of previous research has been the lack of expert insights on Dai ethnic elements in the analysis of Xia Liang's compositions. Prior studies have often lacked depth, failing to engage directly with experts in Dai music (Li, 2018; Luo, 2021). This omission has led to merely a musical understanding of how Xia Liang's works reflect and reinterpret Dai's ethnic characteristics without ethnographic insights. In contrast, the present study will leverage on two expert interviews to gain a richer, more nuanced comprehension of the Dai influences in Xia Liang's compositions. Such expert perspectives are invaluable in accurately interpreting the cultural significance and musical nuances in his work, offering a more complete and insightful analysis than previous research.

In analysing Xia Liang's pieces, this study aims to kindle a deeper cross-cultural appreciation, shining a spotlight on Yunnan's vibrant musical heritage and its profound impact on contemporary compositions. This research is not just an academic exercise; it serves as an invaluable resource for music educators, students, and composers alike. It invites them to explore the dynamic interplay of ethnic and

contemporary music, enhancing the broader appreciation of cultural diversity in the music domain.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research focus, outlining the cultural and musical contexts of Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*. By situating this work within the framework of Yunnan piano music, the chapter highlights the fusion of Dai ethnic traditions with Western compositional techniques, emphasising the significance of preserving and innovating cultural heritage. The discussion also outlines the research objectives and significance, underscoring the study's aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the five movements and address gaps in existing scholarship.

The next chapter will critically review the relevant literature, evaluating existing research on Yunnan piano music, Dai traditions, and Xia Liang's compositions. This review will provide a theoretical framework for analysing the fusion of cultural and musical elements in *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*, positioning this study within the broader academic discourse.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to thoroughly examine previous works in three areas. First, it delves into existing research on Dai ethnic music, dissecting its melodies, rhythms, and harmonies that shape this musical tradition. Second, the examination of piano compositions inspired by ethnic traditions provides a context to understand how the essence of Dai music has been integrated into Western compositional frameworks. The final section of this chapter will review past literature on *Scenes from Xishuangbanna* to uncover the intricate layers where Dai heritage converges with contemporary expression. This layered approach creates a narrative that sets the stage for further research.

2.1 Existing Studies on Dai Ethnic Music

Zhao and Wu's ethnological work (1997) emerges as a pivotal reference in this research, delving into the comprehensive study of Dai ethnic life. The authors provide a detailed account of the Dai people in Xishuangbanna, Dehong Dai Autonomous Prefecture, and other districts in Yunnan along the Honghe River and Jinsha River. This ethnology book distinguishes itself from others through its meticulous descriptions and field records, emphasising the cultural diversity, long history, and cross-border aspects of the Dai ethnicity. It rectifies the lack of prior research by presenting field data from past studies and supplementing it with the author's first-hand observations, offering a holistic view of Dai's life. While this work serves as a critical reference for understanding the broader aspects of Dai culture, the lack of emphasis on the musical analysis of Dai music presents a gap in the literature.

Xie & Xie's (2012) theoretical framework, focusing on the music of 25 ethnic minorities in Yunnan, is also an essential resource for its blend of theoretical insights and practical information. Each chapter is dedicated to a specific ethnic group and intricately details each community, music overviews, characteristics, and analyses of music scores, providing an understanding of each group's musical heritage. This comprehensive study, aiming to promote and preserve Yunnan's national music culture, proves invaluable for understanding the authentic styles of diverse ethnicities. Specifically addressing Dai music, the authors highlight the significance of *Zhang Ha*, an influential spoken-word song deeply embedded in Dai culture. They trace the roots of Dai music culture back to 109 B.C., emphasising the enduring nature of Dai traditions. The inclusion of Dai music modes, particularly the pentatonic scale, provides a deeper understanding of the intricacies of Dai music. Relevant to this research, this book serves as a foundational reference, as it not only provides insights into the authentic basic style of Dai music, including its modes and representative works. By delving into the roots of Dai music and understanding its characteristics, this book becomes a valuable resource for the present research, as it creates a platform for the researcher to unravel the connections between traditional Dai music and modern piano compositions.

Xie & Xie (2012) summarise the main characteristics of Dai ethnic music as follows: i) Dai ethnic music is categorised based on different content and forms, including mountain songs, folk songs, love songs, children's songs, work songs, narrative songs, dance music, Buddhist music, Dai opera, and instrumental music. ii) It belongs to the pentatonic scale system of Chinese music, but its application of scales differs from that of other ethnic minority music. Common pentatonic scales

include **Gong** (C - D - E - G - A), **Shang** (D - E - G - A - C), **Jiao (Jue)** (E - G - A - C - D), and **Zhi** (G - A - C - D - E). For example, a representative Dai folk song *New Year Is Coming (Folk Song)* performed during their New Year celebrations alternates between different scales based on the same tonic $E\flat$ and $E\flat$ in Figure 3, creating colourful contrasts within its short structure. The final phrase modulates to $B\flat$, as an ending. This interplay between modes, as demonstrated in this example, reflects the rich creativity of Dai musical traditions and enhances the expressive capabilities of their compositions. These details further underscore the importance of modulation in Dai music, adding depth to its tonal context. Such tonal characteristics, particularly the use of alternating scales and tonal modulation as described by Xie and Xie (2012), are instrumental in understanding the creative processes in contemporary compositions like Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*. These modal techniques demonstrate how traditional ethnic elements can be effectively integrated into modern harmonic frameworks, enriching the expressive potential of the music.

新 年 到 了
(风俗歌)

德宏 瑞丽 傣族

中速 稍慢 **E flat Zhi**

新年到 了 嘍， 大 爷 奶 奶 向 你 们

拜 年， 三 月 过 去 四 月 又 来 到， 四 月

E flat Gong

四 月 又 来 到， 天 神 天 神 让 新 年 又 呀 又 来 到，

B flat Gong

我 们 敲 起 锣 鼓 好 热 闹 好 热 闹， 呛 乒 呛 乒 呛 乒 乒。

(演唱: 朗赛柯 译词: 刀存华 记谱: 谢崇抒)

Figure 3 *New Year Is Coming (Folk Song)*
original score from Xie and Xie (2012)

Additionally, Dai music is characterised by the frequent use of third intervals and repetitive melodies, as well as circular and continuation melodic techniques. iii) It features regular and rhythmic patterns, often in 2/4 or 4/4 time signatures, with occasional variations. This rhythmic consistency contributes to the expressive and rhythmic appeal of Dai music. iv) Moreover, Dai ethnic music employs various modulation techniques, with the most natural being modulation to subordinate scales. Other modulation techniques include changing the tonic, subdominant, or supertonic, adding richness and versatility to Dai music's expressive capabilities. Incorporating these detailed characteristics enhances the foundational understanding necessary for exploring the interplay between traditional Dai music and the contemporary piano compositions in Xia Liang's *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*.

In Zhou's (2000) significant work on Yunnan ethnic music, titled *Yunnan Ethnic Music Theory*, the exploration of the region's musical traditions is meticulously explored. The research is structured into three primary categories: Yunnan folk song (*gē yuè*), Yunnan folk dance music (*wǔ yuè*), and Yunnan folk instrumental music (*qǐ yuè*). The systematic classification presented by the author serves as a foundational framework relevant to the present research on the infusion of Dai ethnic music into Western compositional frameworks. Notably, the folk songs section covers various aspects of life, including ancient, labour, love, marriage, and children songs of different ethnic groups in Yunnan. The introduction of Dai's "*Zhang Ha* or *Zan Ha*" in the ancient songs, a sacrificial song dispelling evil spirits and ghosts, holds significance in understanding the spiritual dimensions of Dai culture. In addition,

Yunnan's rich array of ethnic instrumental music, nearly 200 kinds, is briefly summarised by Zhou, emphasising the challenge of systematically presenting such diversity. This aligns with the complexities the researcher anticipates in this research regarding the integration of Dai instrumental elements into Western compositions. The mention of Dai's *Chuan Gu Niang Diao* played on the *Ding Qin*, a Dai stringed instrument, provides a specific cultural reference contributing to the present research exploration of Dai heritage in contemporary expressions.

However, Zhou's (2000) work, while informative, falls short in providing a detailed analysis of Dai musical elements essential for understanding the nuanced connections between traditional Dai music and modern piano compositions. This gap is pivotal for this present study, which aims to explore the interplay between Dai ethnic characteristics and contemporary piano composition, focusing on *Scenes from Xishuangbanna*. Therefore, the relevance of this literature to this research is grounded in its comprehensive scope, but its limitations emphasise the need for a focused examination of Dai musical elements, a gap this study seeks to address.

Research on Dai ethnicity, notably explored by Yang (2003) and Ding (2022), delves into the intricacies of Dai Buddhist festivals, especially in Yunnan. Dai, followers of Theravada Buddhism, have preserved their rich ritual music, with festivals like the Vassa Festival, which retains a relatively pure Buddhist traditional essence amid the evolution of many religious festivals into national or secular events. Yang (2003) highlights that due to various complex political, economic, and social reasons, many original religious festivals have evolved into national or secular celebrations. However, the Vassa Festival has remained a relatively pure Buddhist

traditional festival. This point underscores the unique preservation of ritual music within the Dai community. Yang's (2003) research significantly contributes to understanding Southern Buddhism, an area less emphasised in Chinese academic literature. His meticulous study delves into the music of the southern Buddhist festival among the Yunnan Dai, filling a critical gap in research on Theravada Buddhism in the Southeast Asian context. This is important to the present work because the Dai religion is intricately linked to Theravada Buddhism, influencing their daily lives and musical expressions. As previous literature notes, Dai music, particularly *Zhang Ha*, integrates religious music, providing crucial insights for understanding the broader characteristics of Dai music.

Through case studies and analyses, Yang (2003) not only describes the three major Buddhist schools but also establishes connections between Yunnan Dai Buddhist festival music and Myanmar Buddhist music, highlighting geographical influences, and Thai Buddhist music, influenced by economic factors. This exploration forms a substantial foundation for comprehending the cultural and musical dynamics within the Dai community and how religion plays a role in shaping their musical tradition. Ding's (2022) work complements this by providing foundational insights into Dai's religious beliefs, distinguishing between ancient religion and Theravada Buddhism. His research on animistic worship, animal religious sacrifice, and totem worship provides a holistic view of the traditional Dai society, emphasising the close relationship between Dai folk music culture and ancient religious beliefs. This connection is vital for deciphering how religious traditions have shaped Dai's musical expressions, which is crucial for understanding the integration of these traditions into modern compositions.