

# The Yi Music Writing Techniques of Jiaba Asan

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## Abstract

The title of this thesis is Yi music writing techniques of Jiaba Asan. The research objectives are: 1, Study about Yi music writing techniques of Jiaba Asan, 2, Analysis components of selected Yi music of Jiaba Asan. The research site is located in Butuo County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China. Through the on-site interview of the key informant Mr. Jiaba Asan, and the use of musicology theory to analysis the two songs "Dream back to Nanzhao" and "Morning night", the method of on-site interview, questionnaire survey and collection of literature data, to obtain the research results.

Through research, the author finds that: 1, Jiaba Asan uses Yi ethnic religious music and folk song materials to create song melodies, and writes lyrics using cultural themes such as Yi mythology, epics, and poetry. 2, Jiaba Asan uses electronic and ethnic instruments, as well as contemporary music harmony to arrangement songs, and uses computer music software to record songs. 3, Jiaba Asan's childhood memories and observations and perceptions of life are the source of song creation. This research emphasizes the innovation of Yi music, and puts forward specific implementation suggestions for the reference of relevant personnel.

**Keywords:** Southwest Sichuan; Yi music; Pop music; Writing techniques.

## Introduction

After China's reform and opening up, China's economy has achieved rapid development. In addition, in the field of art, China has also strengthened cultural exchanges with other countries. After long-term development and innovation, western music has gradually formed a music culture represented by popular music. Its pop music has the characteristics of system and scale, which provides a valuable reference for the development of Chinese pop music. The entry of Western pop music has had a huge impact on the aesthetics of most people and music producers in China, and therefore makes pop music popular in China. However, due to irregularities in the music industry, imperfect systems and many other factors, the phenomenon of popular music being imitated is serious, resulting in the public's aesthetic bias towards the melody of the music to determine the popularity of the work, ignoring the cultural connotation conveyed by the work itself, This phenomenon also exists in the creation of some folk music, which hinders or even distorts the development of national music. In terms of music creation, it is a new challenge for creators to accept new modern elements while preserving traditional culture (Li Shu, 2022).

Yi folk music and traditional culture are the roots of Yi music creation, while pop music is an element of modern music and a form of musical expression that contemporary young people are keen on. In the creation of popular music of the Yi nationality, we need to think about how to combine the two skillfully to create popular works. The purpose of this article is through field investigation and work analysis. The first goal is to explain Jiaba Asan's music

creation process, and to learn how to use folk music as the theme to create pop music that meets modern aesthetic needs. The second goal is to analyze the selected excellent works of Jiaba Asan, and understand the process of fusion of Yi folk music and modern music, which will play a certain role in promoting the development of pop music in the region in the future. This is why author wrote this The main reason for this article.

## Research Objectives

1. To study about Yi music writing techniques of Jiaba Asan.
2. To analysis components of selected Yi music of Jiaba Asan.

## Research Methodology

This research adopts qualitative research method. Through fieldwork, three groups of key informants, general informants and casual informants were selected to interview, and data were collected by questionnaire survey, library materials and network resources. The data are screened and classified, and the useful information is selected through comparative analysis.

## Research Scope

The research scope of this article is 1. Study Mr. Jiaba Asan's Yi music writing techniques, 2. Analysis the components of Mr. Jiaba Asan's selected Yi music. The research site is located in Butuo County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, southwest Sichuan, China. The research period is from July 2022 to April 2023.

## Research Results

1. In the first objective, through interviews and research on Jiaba Asan, we learned how he created Yi pop songs, which can be summarized in the following aspects:

- 1) Jiaba Asan uses Yi ethnic religious music and folk song materials to create song melodies, and writes lyrics using cultural themes such as Yi mythology, epics, and poetry.
- 2) Jiaba Asan uses electronic and ethnic instruments, as well as contemporary music harmony to arrangement songs, and uses computer music software to record songs.
- 3) Jiaba Asan's childhood memories and observations and perceptions of life are the source of song creation.

2. In the second objective, through the analysis of Jiaba Asan's selected songs, the following conclusions are drawn:

Jiaba Asan's songs are sung with a Adu Gaoqiang and arranged with contemporary harmonies. The style of his works covers pop, folk, rock, electronic music and many other European and American music elements. The accompaniment of the song is mainly an electronic band (electric guitar, electric bass, electric synthesizer, electric drum, etc.), supplemented by Yi folk instruments such as Kouxian. The music is arranged using contemporary music harmonies and the lyrics are sung in Yi language. The popular arrangement combines folk singing methods to give the ancient primitive words a catchy melody.

## Song Melody Writing

### 1. Adu Gaoqiang

In the Yi ethnic area of Liangshan, Sichuan, people's marriages are based on the principles of endogamy within the same ethnic group, endogamy among castes, exogamy within the family branch, and non-marriage between aunts and cousins (Jiaba Asan, 2022: 22-31.). Therefore, the choice of marriage partner is restricted by many factors, but people here also have the custom of free love before marriage. Unmarried young men and women can meet and date privately. When young men and women meet for the first time, everyone is relatively shy and keeps a long distance from each other. The language expression is often not expressive and smooth due to nervousness. Therefore, young men and women often communicate by singing or playing musical instruments. Music is used as a medium for love, and music has its place. In addition, the way of singing and playing musical instruments can directly express a young man's courage, temperament, talent, wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, Adu Gaoqiang singing has become a very important part of the communication process of Adu people, such as the Gaoqiang "Ya Aiqing":

### Ya Aiqing

Transcription by Weixing Chen



Figure 1. Gaoqiang "Ya Aiqing"

Source: Weixing Chen (2023)

### 2. Religious music

In the Yi area, there are two types of clergy: Bimo and Suni. Bimo is a religious priest in Yi society, and Suni is a wizard who specializes in exorcising ghosts. In the daily life of the Yi people, they all play a special and sacred role of "people and gods share the same". Bimo and Suni originally lived in a Yi village and were engaged in agricultural production during the busy farming season. The rest of the time they spent at home waiting for invitations from others. However, the market economy has also quietly changed the religion of the Yi people. The field of religious performance is also constantly expanding. Many religious elements are also used in popular music. Many clergy are also willing to go to the stage and join in cultural performances. Go in. Ritual songs that can only be heard at the ceremony are increasingly being used in current popular music.

The main function of Bimo music is to curse enemies and point the way. It is mainly in four beats and two beats. The rhythm is scattered and free, a bit like the R&B style of rap music in contemporary music. Bimo's ancestors would use chickens, pigs, cows, and sheep to sacrifice to ghosts and gods, so that the ghosts and gods could take away the souls of their enemies. Among the Zhilu music, "Cuo Bi" is the most typical sacrificial music. It is the largest sacrificial activity in the Liangshan Yi area, aiming to save the souls of the dead old people

and let them live peacefully and happily in heaven. Suni music mainly curses ghosts and gods. Legend has it that ghosts and gods will hook people's souls away. Suni singing Suni music will take back people's souls from the hands of ghosts and gods, and people can be reborn. When Suni conjures spirits, they usually sing while beating a sheepskin drum to syncopate the main rhythm. Those with mild illness kill chickens, and those with severe illness kill pigs and sheep. In this way, the lives of animals can be exchanged for human souls.

At the beginning of the Bimo sacrificial ceremony, various types of scriptures need to be chanted continuously. Bimo assistants burn a stone until it turns red, and then put the stone into a container of water, using the steam formed by boiling the stone into the water. , surround the ceremony site, and sing while offering sacrifices, such as the following chanting style Jingqiang:

## Jingqiang

Transcription by Weixing Chen



Figure 2. Bimo Jingqiang

Source: Weixing Chen (2023)

The Bimo sacrificial ceremony is widely spread among the people. In the sacrificial ceremony, folk song-like tunes and ballad-like language are used to recite the behavioral norms of the Yi people. Jiaba Asan made full use of the melody characteristics of the Yi religious music during the creation process. Sometimes clergy are invited to communicate and create on the spot, perform on the same stage, etc., so that some works have distinctive personalities and national characteristics.

## Lyric content writing

### 1. Adu Gaoqiang lyrics

The lyrics used in Aadu Gaoqiang are divided into two parts: fixed chapters and improvisations. The fixed chapters are based on traditional love stories, with five-character or seven-character lyrics as lyrics. The lyrics are very long and can be sung from night to dawn; improvisations include on-the-spot performance, adapted themes, and temporary lyrics. The lyrics are easy to understand and catchy. The improvised lyrics include "ah ah ah ah ah yo, mu ah ah ah ah oh, ah ah, ah" and so on. It is sung with a combination of real and false voices,

which has strong improvisation and lyricism. Sometimes people can't express their feelings in words, so they just sing with lyrics. The word "Aya" is added at the beginning or end of the song, which means pain and sadness in the Adu language. These lining words and lining words, which are constantly and flexibly changed according to the mood of the singer, express people's different thoughts and emotions in singing.

## 2. Yi and Chinese lyrics

The lyrics of Jiaba Asan's songs include both Yi lyrics and Chinese lyrics, as well as lyrics that are a combination of Yi and Chinese. This model draws on the themes of Yi folk lyric poems for creation.

The Yi people have a large amount of rich folk literature and are known as "the nation with the richest folk literature in Southwest China". The long narrative poem is the crystallization of the wisdom of the Yi people. It is a long narrative poem passed down by the Yi people through oral creation. The ancestors of the Yi people created their own writing very early. There are two main ways of spreading long folk lyric poems of the Yi people: one is spread by word of mouth, and the other is spread in the form of written words. They mainly express complaints. The theme of the unreasonable marriage system embodies the emotion of longing for freedom and happiness in married life. These stories have become indispensable creative materials for Jiaba Asan.

The mother tongue of the Yi poets in Daliangshan is Yi. Many poets have received Chinese cultural education since childhood. Some poets choose to create in Chinese forms, and some poets choose to write poetry in both Yi and Han languages. They not only flow with the blood of the mother tongue of the nation, but also master the With the expression skills of Chinese, the poet can freely enter and exit the two languages, and consciously or unconsciously create and reconstruct the poetic language. Jiaba Asan drew on poetry creation techniques. In the creation of the song "Morning Light", the first part is Yi lyrics, and the second part is Chinese lyrics. Not only does the entire lyrics not appear obtrusive, but the two texts echo each other, and the two cultures interact with each other. Blending is unprecedented in Yi pop songs. It is also innovative in terms of lyrics and has achieved great success.

## Analysis of the song "Dream Back to Nanzhao"

### 1. Structure

The song "Dream Back to Nanzhao" is a combination of Yi religious music and folk songs, the singing style is Adu Gaoqiang. The song is 5 minutes and 10 seconds long and is divided into three parts. The first part is Bimo chanting sutras of the Yi people. The content of the sutras comes from some fragments of the Yi epic poem "Leeteyi" and the history of the evolution of heaven, earth, man and all things. After a minute of chanting as a foreshadowing, it gradually introduces the second chapter. In the second part, Adu Gaoqiang. The second part is also the main part of the song. Finally, the third part ends with Suni beating the sheepskin drum. This is also part of the religious ceremony and echoes the Bimo chanting in the prelude.

The structure of the music is a monophonic piece, and each phrase is a song. The religious rituals before and after are just for foreshadowing, highlighting the national character of the work and enhancing the sense of ritual. A phrase is a song, and the rhythm pattern is a dotted pattern with a short front and a long back. These forms are considered in music history

to be the characteristics of folk songs in the primitive period. Its musical form is obviously ancient, this musical form is almost common in Butuo Adu Gaoqiang folk songs.

## 2. Melody

The beginning of the singing is a continuous upward jump of two perfect 4th, then suddenly rises to a high note, and then continues to be sung in a falsetto voice, then quickly jump down and fall back to the starting note. At the end of the phrase, it changes to true voice, the long note of the sound ends a phrase (Figure 3), and a similar melody trend change and pattern progression method is used to repeat several phrases before ending the whole song. Most of the singing range is around E4. The melody has strong jumping characteristics, high and low, sharp sound and unrestrained emotions. It is the most natural and sincere emotional expression for the Yi people. The singing method mainly adopts the falsetto voice method. After singing in the true voice, the calling Gaoqiang is suddenly sung in the falsetto voice, and the subsequent lyrics are sung with a dotted note rhythm, and finally the song quickly drops to the bass ending. Compared with other Yi folk songs, Adu Gaoqiang does not emphasize embellishment, but is simple and natural. It has a unique and distinctive personality, highlighting the straightforward character of the Yi Adu people.



Figure 3. "Dream back to Nanzhao"

Source: Weixing Chen (2023)

## 3. Key

The song is in the key of A minor and starts with the note E2 (Figure 3). The first phrase is a natural melody built around the note E, with no inflections. Immediately afterwards, the second phrase starts from the D2 note, changes and repeats the melody of the first phrase, and then falls to the A1 note, returning to the tonic of A minor. The subsequent melody is developed on the basis of A minor. The whole song has a simple tonality and no obvious modulation, which is also in line with the single tonality of traditional folk songs.

#### 4. Harmony arrangement

The overall accompaniment of the song is mainly folk guitar, with Yi Kouxian used as a link between phrases. The second section adds a flute sound as a countermelody, which echoes the Gaoqiang in tandem. The song ends with slight percussion. The drum beats add to the atmosphere and tension, pushing the mood of the entire song to a climax. The harmony of the song is mainly reflected in the guitar chords. Starting from 1 minute and 12 seconds, the guitar plays the Am7 chord, the second measure is the F#dim chord, changing the G note in the soprano to the F# note, leaving the basso and alto unchanged (Figure 4). This technique of using chords that only changes the soprano note is used in popular music. Very commonly used in.

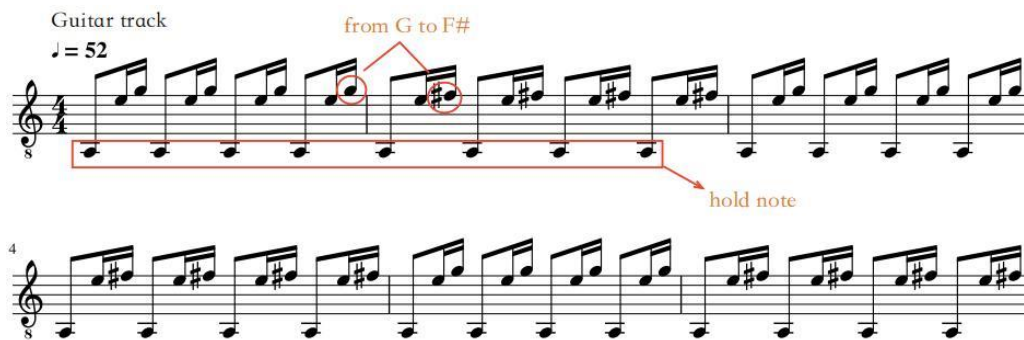


Figure 4. Guitar track of "Dream Back to Nanzhao"

Source: Weixing Chen (2023)

#### 5. Emotional transmission

The song "Dream back to Nanzhao" starts with Bimo's chanting (Picture 5) and ends with Suni's god-inviting ceremony (Picture 6). What the author wants to embody is a kind of cultural tracing. Bimo, who raps the epic, is the author's uncle. The passage he raps is the creation of the Yi people. It was when there was no sky above and no earth below, and there was chaos, that there were only people, animals and plants... conveying the origin of humankind. and Yi history. The whole song is sung with the help of the legend of the Book of Songs of the Yi people. Different elements such as Adu Gaoqiang, Yi oral strings, religious rituals, etc. add up to make the song more diversified. In the artistic performance that combines religious rituals and song singing, it conveys National sentiment and personal consciousness.

Therefore, whether in silent ritual emotions or vocal songs, Yi traditional religion and music have similar properties. Religious cultural elements expand the space for artistic expression for individual expression and have also become a way for them to treat traditional culture. In contemporary Yi pop music, religious cultural elements are undoubtedly typical symbols of national elements, adding recognition and meaning to Yi music in the dazzling music world. Religious culture is separated from solemn and mysterious performance scenes and appears in the public's field of vision in the form of performative and appreciative pop music. It not only allows the public to understand the mysterious Yi religious culture, but also

presents it in a new form. Returning to the original context, it plays a role in re-spreading to the Yi area.



Figure 5. Bimo of the Yi ethnic group  
Source: Weixing Chen (2023)



Figure 6. Suni of the Yi ethnic group  
Source: Wenxing Chen (2023)

### **Analysis of the song "Morning Light"**

#### **1. Background**

The song "Morning Light" is Jiaba Asan's famous song and is a typical pop music style. The song won the Top Ten Golden Melody Award in the third season of Zhejiang Satellite TV's "Chinese Good Songs" in 2016. Talking about the creation of the song "Morning Light", Jiaba Asan said: "This is a memory of my childhood. I am a Yi from Daliangshan. When I was a child, there was no electricity at home. At night, the villagers would gather around the campfire and sing together. Moreover, I didn't know what mineral water was before. The mountain spring water in my hometown can be drunk directly. "Morning Sun" is my recollection of my childhood life that is gone forever. Jiaba Asan said: "My childhood To sum it up, just like the song, it was very warm, neither hot nor cold, just

when the sun just came out. You know the sun just came out in spring. It is a scene that I can't forget in my life. I can think of a lot from this temperature. If you want to Speaking of the purpose of writing this song, I think it is to express the warmth between people during childhood in the Yi area. "

At the same time, Jiaba Asan also said: "I think many songs in Yi people's life have two extremes. One extreme is that one melody fills an epic. Its tune can complete the entire epic, but the words are different. . The other extreme is to have only melody and improvised singing, but only one line of words, or no lyrics at all, and all the songs are sung with words such as "ah yah ah ah"." In the view of the researcher, Jiaba Asan is trying to break the These two extremes are to make the lyrics poetic and beautiful, but also to make the melody rich and varied. This kind of breakthrough is rare in Yi music.

## 2. Structure

The song "Morning Light" has a binary form structure and is a typical pop music style. The song is 4 minutes and 56 seconds long and is divided into two sections A+B. Section A1 is four phrases of equal length. Sections A2 and A1 have the same melody but different ending note (Figure 7). Section B is the chorus part of the song. The whole song is composed of A+B+A+B+B section structure, and ends with a concluding sentence of 4 bars.

**Moring Light**

Composer: Jiaba Asan  
Transcription by Weixing Chen (2023)

♩ = 70

The figure displays a musical score for the song "Moring Light" in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 70 beats per minute. It consists of four staves. The first staff (measures 1-4) is labeled A1. The second staff (measures 5-8) is labeled A2. The third staff (measures 9-12) is a repeat of the first staff. The fourth staff (measures 13-16) is also labeled A2. A red arrow points from the ending note of the first A1 section (measure 4) to the ending note of the second A2 section (measure 16), with the text "Same melody but different ending notes" written next to it. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Figure 7. "Morning Light"

Source: Weixing Chen (2023)

## 3. Key

The verse part of the song is in the key of C major. It uses a straightforward singing to recall the scenes of life in childhood. The morning sunshine and the sheep on the distant hillside are vividly visible. The lyrics of "Ah ya ya yo ho" in the chorus part are modulation

from C major to F major in the verse part, and the melody continues to stay in the soprano (Figure 8). Although it is difficult to sing, this is where the Yi people stand. The way of singing freely on the top of the mountain is also their way of expressing their love for music and the land. At the same time, after the chorus ends, a brief closing sentence is used to express Jiaba Asan's nostalgia for his lost childhood life.

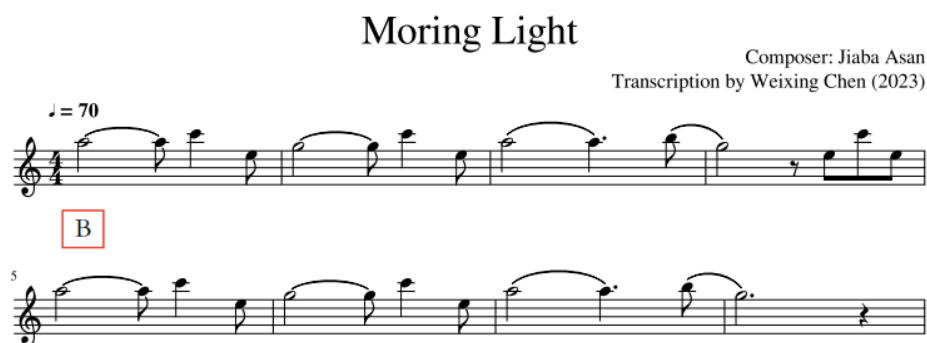


Figure 8. "Moring Light"

Source: Weixing Chen (2023)

#### 4. Harmony arrangement

The song is mainly accompanied by piano broken chords, and the piano tone is integrated with Jiaba Asan's vast and ethereal voice. In terms of harmony, a large number of chord progressions from contemporary pop music are used in the arrangement. For example, the Cadd9 chord at the beginning of section A (Figure 9) is a commonly used chord in contemporary pop music. The song begins to add string parts in the A section after the bridge, using electronic synthesizer timbres and playing long lines in the soprano as a foreshadowing (Figure 10), which increases the thickness of the accompaniment parts and makes the vocals sound more there is power.

**Moring Light**

Composer: Jiaba Asan  
Transcription by Weixing Chen (2023)

Piano track

♩ = 70

Figure 9 displays the piano track for "Moring Light". It is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 70. The notation is presented in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). A red box highlights the first measure of the piano part, which is identified as a Cadd9 chord. The track continues with a series of broken chords and melodic lines in both hands.

Figure 9. Piano track of "Moring Light"

Source: Chen Weixing (2023)



Figure 10. String track of “Moring Light”

Source: Chen Weixing (2023)

## 5. Lyrics

The original lyrics of "Morning Light" are entirely in Yi language. In order to allow more people to understand themselves, Jiaba Asan made some adjustments on the stage of "Chinese Good Songs" and performed the second verse of the song with Chinese lyrics. The translated language, along with Jiaba Asan's poetic singing, will make people involuntarily think back to their childhood. The song "Morning Light" has a strong sense of immersion. This song is also like Jiaba Asan himself. It does not need too much decorate and is performed in the most simple singing form.

## Discussion

Through research, the author learned that the essence of Yi music lies in Yi religious music. Jiaba Asan's song "Dreaming Back to Nanzhao" begins with an old Yi man singing the Yi epic "Genesis" in a voice of vicissitudes, which is consistent with the point Sun Zhiyan mentions in his article "Jiaba Asan Poetic Singer who Comes from Pingchuyuanfan." Second, Jikezigu mentioned in "Research on Contemporary Liangshan Yi Music Literature" that the literariness of Yi music is the most prominent feature of Yi music. Through research, the author found that Jiaba Asan used a large number of minority cultures in song creation, especially the use of traditional Yi poetry themes to create lyrics, which fully reflected the literariness of Yi music. It is consistent with Jikezigu's view. Third, through the analysis of selected songs, the author learned that Jiaba Asan fully integrated pop musical elements in the creation of Yi songs. Sun Zhiyan also proved this view in her own research, saying that Jiaba Asan lived half in tradition and half in modernity. His music is based on the native language of the Yi ethnic group, combining traditional Yi music with pop music.

Finally, about Jiaba Asan putting religious rituals on stage. Some scholars believe that this tradition should not be placed in unfamiliar cultural scenes and Spaces, and others believe that it is a cultural parody for some economic interests, and there should be no real clergy on the stage. In this regard, the author holds a different view. The author believes that by presenting folk culture to the public in the way of music, the traditional culture in music is no longer the tradition itself, it is invented by the performers. In the new environment, the

sacredness and functionality of traditional culture are covered, and the performance and appreciation are presented, and its ritual and mystery will not be reduced when it returns to the original environment. In this sense, we should thank the efforts of Yi musicians. The essence of culture is its ability to spread. In the process of spreading, old meanings are constantly disappearing and new meanings are added, thus promoting the development of traditional culture and promoting cultural exchanges and integration.

## Recommendations

### 1. Theoretical recommendations

This article makes a detailed study on the innovation of Jiaba Asan Yi music. The social value brought by this innovation and its role in the spread of Yi music need further study. In addition, the Yi have many local folk songs and religious music. How to make good use of these precious folk materials and maintain tradition and innovation under the background of the new era is worth every musician to explore and study.

### 2. Policy recommendations

Innovation is not easy, literary and art workers spend a lot of time and energy on creation, but they do not get the corresponding return. The government and cultural institutions should increase support for original musicians, such as inviting musicians to cooperate, participate in performances and increase funding for cultural research, so that the efforts of creators can be rewarded, attract more musicians to innovate, and promote the sustainable development of folk music.

### 3. Practical recommendations

First of all, the results of this study can provide reference for the song creation of young Yi musicians. Secondly, cultural institutions can make use of the excellent works of Jiaba Asan to carry out cultural publicity, improve national awareness and build cultural self-confidence. Finally, cultural dissemination should start from an early age. Schools and educational institutions can organize musicians to hold lectures and incorporate excellent works into classroom teaching.

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