

A SKETCH OF THE MUSICAL HERITAGE  
OF THE HANI (YUNNAN/ CHINA)

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The Hani are a Tibeto-Burman speaking people, scattered over a wide area in Southern China and neighbouring countries. In China proper, the Hani, whose population is reported to be more than a million, mainly inhabit a mountainous area situated on both banks of the Red River (Honghe) which runs through the south-eastern part of Yunnan, and especially the Ailao range flanking its southern bank. Although several articles and even books are available in Mandarin, so far nothing has been published on Hani music that is accessible to non-Sinologists. Although very scanty, this report is the first attempt to introduce the musical tradition of this ethnic group to a larger audience.

### Songs

Hani musical culture is rich, as is the oral tradition itself. Although there is no polyphonic singing, the vocal repertoire includes solos, antiphonal singing and choruses, the most popular singing forms being unison and responsive. The singing repertoire is commonly divided into six types of songs: children's songs (*anini-tsatsa* or *zagu tsatan*), lullabies (*ani-musha*, *ani-thu*), dance songs (*sokë-so-ae*, *lotso*), love songs (*atsi*, *atshi*), festive songs (*xaba*) and reciter's songs (*Pema-thu*).

Only a few minorities in Yunnan can match the Hani in terms of the vividness and variety of children's songs. In one village of the Xishuangbanna Prefecture, more than 70 samples were collected from a couple of adult singers and 4 or 5 pupils<sup>1</sup>. Hani children's songs are usually melodious and vivid. Melodies

<sup>1</sup> Yang Fang, 1993.

are short in length, wide in range and all possess rhythms which are interesting and precise. Lullaby songs may also fall in this category. Children's songs can be performed anywhere, but they are generally sung after dusk when children gather together to play in an outdoor area of the village for the first hours of the night, and are often accompanied by dances. They may be sung either as a solo or in unison by groups of individuals. Call and response by a leading voice and an ensemble of voices are often encountered, the answer being in most cases a mere repetition of the call. The leader sets the general tone of the song (which may vary greatly) as well as the tempo, rhythmic changes and general nuances which occur in such performances.

Titles are often determined by the initial words of the songs, and the lyrics extensively reflect daily life and play. Although they are not the general rule, rhymes are sometimes encountered. More frequently, sentences are elaborated on the model of the "genealogical patronymic linkage system", a very meaningful structure in Hani society which consists of giving as the first syllable(s) of the son's name the last syllable(s) of his father's name<sup>2</sup>. In children songs, sentences are often linked on the same word linkage basis, as in the following verse:

*bala thisi sa-ē moku-aga,  
 moku-aga luma thaeba,  
 luma-thaeba bo-dē tshusu  
 bo-dē tshusu khuubē la-tsae  
 khuuza latsae khuuma la-u  
 khuuma la-u tshomo lanō  
 tshomo lanō zagu lathu  
 zagu-lathu tshaelo bitho  
 tshaelo thosa ma-u dzakha*

<sup>2</sup> See P. Bouchery, 1995: 28-36.

The round moon highlights (the village of) "Moku-aga",  
 "Moku-aga" with large, flat stones,  
 The large flat stones, a bamboo bell rings,  
 The ringing of the bell awakens the dogs in their kennels,  
 The little dogs are awake, their mother barks,  
 The barking of the bitch awakens the old man,  
 The old man is awake, he awakes the child,  
 and he asks him to go to husk the rice with a pestle,  
 The carefully husked rice will provide the rice meal.

or in a looser form:

*çaeji "lilē" dza  
 "lilē" xabo dzae  
 xabo dae xu dzae  
 xae xu xae lao lao  
 Jilao-laopa tshi.*

Dance songs (*sokē-so-ae*), as the name implies, are sung by men and women while dancing. They, like children's songs, display a wide range of short, melodious and vivid melodies. Like children's songs, they may be sung either as a solo or in unison by groups of individuals. Alternative singing is common, either on a basis of call and response by a leading voice and a choir, or on a two-group basis, the answer sometimes being a repetition of the call. Dance songs also include a category of lamentation chants (*lotso*) sung for funerals accompanied by instrumental ensemble music and collective dancing around the coffin.

Love songs (*atsi* or *atshi*) are exclusively sung by young people, individually or collectively, but always outside and usually at the outskirts of the village (fields, paths, mountains). The repertoire is divided into three types according to the loudness of the voice: *tshīma* (high), *lopē* (middle) and *tshīza* (low). Texts of *tshīma* love songs are usually introduced and ended by loud

interjections, but this is not the case with *tshiza* which, as lullabies, are calm and almost whispered. Because love songs are essentially textual songs in which the singer improvises by addressing his or her beloved, it is not surprising that the range of tunes displayed is narrow compared with the children's repertoire, melodies being closer to other textual songs such as praising songs (see below).

*Misa-we* (*mi*: woman; *sa*: sad; *we*: to cry, sometimes called *õxoma*) is a type of lamentation chant sung solo by women in memory of departed relatives, friends or lovers, and relating to the life of the deceased. The song, taking place in the house where the dead body is laid before being taken to the cemetery, also makes up an essential part of funeral ceremonies. At regular intervals sentences are interrupted by collective lamentations (crying may be simulated or not).

A very important type of song (*xaba*;) is represented by what can be tentatively called "laudative songs" (*xa*: to sing loudly; *ba*: to praise, to offer with respect). One might as well call them "festive songs" or "customs songs" as they are mainly heard on festive occasions and their contents mainly relate to tradition and customs. *Xaba* songs are exclusively sung by male adults, especially senior singers when they gather for festive banquets. Therefore they make up an essential part of some festive gatherings such as the New Year (*Gatho-tho*), the festival for the God of the Soil (*Xama-thu*) in February-March and the "swing" festival (*Kudza-dza*) of July, as well as the main ceremonies of the life cycle (births, marriage, funerals, rituals ending the building of a house).

*Xaba* are basically textual songs. Melodies are very limited in range, most of them following a general pattern of tune heard everywhere in the Ailao mountains with only slight variations,

and are not subject to much improvisation<sup>3</sup>. In contrast, the words of the song are more or less free according to the song type and the circumstances of the performance, with the exception of fixed formulae faithfully handed down by tradition. This usually does not mean that the singer invents all the words, but rather draws from a corpus of phrases, of formulae, which he modifies to his taste and whose order he may sometimes change at will. Should the number of syllables in a text be less than the number of notes in a given melodic segment, the singer adds exclamations, interjections or "empty words" of a more or less fixed form, or simply hums the tune.

The lyrics are performed in a narrative form, and thus the song is generally irregular in length. Texts can be very long, and performers can be seen singing night and day for several days. Their construction, however, follows a set of fixed rules which make *xaba* songs resemble chanted poems. Songs are first divided into broad categories according to the ceremony of which they are a part. Because the texts are very long, each song is further divided into a series of verses sung in solo or duet by one or two lead singers. A complete song usually consists of one or several dozen such verses. Each of them, called by the leading voice, is answered by a choir in the form of an interjection expressing content (*So, Sa, Yi, Sa-yi*). Ordinarily, every verse is also included into a set of polite formulae of a more or less fixed form, used to pay respect to the members of the assembly as well as to introduce and conclude the sentences of the verse proper. Their contents vary according to the general context of the celebration, so there are general frameworks of introductions and conclusions for marriage songs, others for funerals, etc. Very often the singer also starts his solo lead the same way the choir is

<sup>3</sup> On special occasions, however, such as honouring a guest, the lyric may be totally improvised. It is a favourite among the better singers because it provides them with opportunities to display their voices and skills in improvisation.

answers each verse, i.e. using the same interjection. The following extract gives an example of such general structures:

### Lead solo singer

#### *Introductory interjection:*

Sayi !

#### *Introductory polite formulae*

The elder brother loves his younger brother,  
Water of the brook (also) loves fishes of the river,  
Your talent for singing *xaba* songs is not small,  
Your talent for singing *xaba* songs is great.

#### *Strophe (proper)*

We cannot see the nine past generations *-utilo* (empty word),  
But their words last forever *-ya* (empty word),  
We cannot hear the voices of the last ten generations *-utilo*  
(empty word),  
But their facts and events last forever *-ya* (empty word),

#### *Conclusive polite formulae*

The elder brother is above his younger brother,  
Elders have a long life.

### Choir

Sa ! Sa ! (*Choir interjective answer*)

Every verse comprises a minimum of two sentences, not including the introductory and conclusive formulae. Sentences of one verse are frequently ended by empty words used to express the feelings of the narrator as well as to produce rhyme effects, most commonly of the AA-BB type. Each verse may be composed of sentences which all consist of either an even or odd number of syllables (not including those of the empty words), or may comprise an ensemble of mixed sentences. Sentences of even verses often comprise the same even number of syllables (eight in

many cases), while sentences of odd verses, although always comprising an odd number of syllables, may be of different lengths (for instance, 5, 7, 9).

The total number of *xaba* songs is still unknown, although the number already listed by Chinese scholars is very great. A typology partially based on Hani classifications has been tentatively elaborated by Yunnanese researchers (Li Yuansong ed., 1989). The contents of the Hani praising songs really embody every aspect of their social life: building techniques, agricultural methods, social customs such as births, marriage and funerals, genealogy, history, calendar, cosmogony, as well as various epic narrations, with the exception of love themes. One of the longest texts is *Aosë-Misë*, which relates the creation of the Universe and mankind. Another, *Aphö-tsopopo*, recalls the ancestral migrations of the Hani from a mythical place of origin located in a mountain cave. Many historical events, sagas and experiences are passed down this way from generation to generation by singing. By listening to the men's choir, children and women assembled in the village for festivals also take this opportunity to learn a great deal from the oral tradition otherwise largely appropriated by men in Hani society. *Xaba* songs therefore make up not only an important part of Hani culture, but are an essential way of transmitting knowledge, ideas, ethics and concepts. Thus they have an educational function as well as a sociological function of enhancing the stability and harmony of social life, helping to maintain both village cohesion and social hierarchy.

The last set of songs consists of ceremonial and worship music sung by Reciters (*Pema*), being called for that reason *Pema-thu*, "Reciter's prayers", although in some cases the priest casts spells but can hardly be said to be singing. The Reciter, who keeps the chanting of long melodies among his specialities, resorts to these kinds of songs as part of the ritual for guiding departed souls to the land of ancestors, to call back lost souls (*sula-ku*), to

drive off evil spirits (*nae-tu, naexa-tu*), to pray for ancestors or any revered spirit whose protection is needed, etc. Such songs not only constitute an essential part of religious ceremonies, but are also thought to contribute in themselves, as formulae, to the efficacy sought through the ritual. A strict adherence to the text transmitted from generation to generation is therefore requested, and this sole aspect sharply differentiates Reciter's songs from other textual songs such as *xaba* and *lotso* types. This may also account for the use in many Reciter's prayers of an archaic language (*Pema-do*, simply called "language of Reciters"), usually incomprehensible to lay people. Ordinarily, no musical instrument accompanies the *Pema's* recitations except sometimes the beating of a gong, or perhaps the ceremonial beating of bamboo sections on the ground and ensemble instrumental music for funerals.

### Musical instruments

So far, about 25 distinct instruments have been identified among the Hani of China, among which wind instruments predominate. Many of them, especially string instruments, have their counterpart in the Han musical patrimony from which they appear to be borrowed. A limited number of them however, such as musical leaves, vegetal horns and wooden "ankle bells", shared with several other neighbouring minorities (especially Yi and Lahu), appear to be genuinely part of a common tribal heritage of central and southern Yunnan. The existence of clarinets, recorder and bossed gongs displays further ties with other South-East Asian cultures. More surprising is the general absence of free-reed instruments such as mouth-organs which are in use among all other neighbouring minorities of this area and, as confirmed by artifacts and written documents, appeared in Yunnan as early as 2000 years ago. The following account gives a list of the instruments most commonly found in the Ailao mountains.

### Wind instruments

#### a) Reed Instruments

*Single reed:* The simplest of all single reed instruments possessed by the Hani merely consists of the reed itself, in the form of a tree leaf set horizontally between the lips and held tight with the fingers, the thin edge of the leaf freely vibrating when breath is blown onto it. It is a favourite among Hani boys who play them solo at night. Several species of hard glossy leaf trees typical of the forest cover of this area are suitable, especially many of the *Lauraceae* and *Rutaceae* families, and more specifically among the latter species of the *citrus* subfamily, the most common ones being known only by their Hani and Yunnanese names -*sini* (Chinese: *mujia*) and *sipi* (Ch: *hongushu*, "red-rice-tree"). Solo performances of leaf reed are used by the Hani, especially young men, to call each other over mountains while they work, or to introduce their courting songs. Melodies, due to the difficulty of playing the instrument, are usually short in length.

Clarinets are scarce in the Chinese and Indochinese world, but the Hani do possess a few varieties. One heteroglottal type found in Jiangcheng area under the name *Lilu* (or *Motu-ala*) is made of a bamboo section measuring approximately 50cm, cut so that it contains a node closed to the mouthpiece. A little below the mouthpiece a hole is pierced and covered by a thin bamboo reed attached to the outer body. The lower end is inserted into a vegetal cornet consisting of the upper half of the fruit of the Calabash Gourd (*Lagenaria siceraria*). The instrument is mainly played by men. A closed idioglottal type popular in the Mojiang area is called *tshilu-lewo* by members of the Xidi subgroup. It has a body made of a straight bamboo tube measuring about 50 cm, in which three holes are pierced (one in the upper end and two in the lower end). A reed is set up in the upper end by taking off a rectangular section of the body while the lower extremity of the

tube is inserted in a hollowed gourd (*Lagenaria siceraria*). Ordinarily the instrument is played outside by men and sometimes used for courting. While playing, the musician may be helped by an assistant holding the lower part of the instrument in his hands. Other kinds of four-hole bamboo clarinets, which are also traditionally played for courting, bear various names (*wobi*, *wobon pili*, *pishi*, *alamiya*, *motu-mutshi*, etc.) and are mainly distinguished by the length of the body. They also only consist of a single tubular body (no calabash is attached to it).

One type of clarinet (*meshao*, or *matsi*) made either of brass or bamboo, resembles the Chinese *bawu*, having a metal reed. It measures approximately 40 cm in length and 3 cm in diameter. Close to the embouchure is a copper reed attached to the body of the instrument. This type bears eight holes (including one back hole), the scale playing F, G, Bb1, C1, D1, Eb1, F1, G1, Ab1. While playing the musician (usually a girl or a woman) holds the instrument at an angle to the right. A legend relates how a young girl, having become mute by the action of some evil spirit, once had the idea to make up an musical instrument that could function as a substitute for her lost voice, using for that purpose a bamboo flute to which she added a wooden reed whose shape imitated a human tongue. Another type called *dēlē*, resembling the Chinese *caobawu*, has six holes and is a favourite instrument along the Sino-Vietnamese border, especially among members of the Duoni subgroup in Jinping area.

#### *Multiple reeds*

The Chinese conical oboe (*suona*) of Arabo-Persian origin is also widespread among the Hani under various names (*sanjie*, *tsédzu*, *dagwe*, *moxa*, etc). Conical oboes are found in a great number of shapes, but all seem to stem from the same Chinese model. The instrument has a double reed made of a piece of flattened reed-plant. Eight holes define a scale which has nothing to do with the pentatonic scale but is characterized by a split of

the minor third into two intervals of 3/4 tones. As elsewhere in China, this type of oboe is closely associated with life cycle rituals, such as marriage and funerals, or agricultural festivals. It is also very commonly used by pairs. Traditionally among Hani of the Yichē subgroup, for instance, two oboes are played by young men in the fields to accompany female workers while transplanting rice. The conical oboe is also an essential part of the set of instruments which, together with horns, gongs and cymbals, makes up the traditional orchestra required for marriage and funerals.

A very popular wind instrument in the Ailao mountains and other areas in the middle of Yunnan Province is a kind of miniature six-hole oboe measuring eight to ten centimeters long and less than a centimeter in diameter, similar in some aspects to the Chinese small-weeping oboe (*xiaomendi*). It has a double reed and can produce shrill and loud sounds, being suited to outdoor playing where it is used both by men and women.

Multiple reed instruments also include a somewhat primitive type of idioglottal oboe called the *wupo* (or *wudu*, *wu-on*), whose vibrating reeds are created simply by cutting multiple slits along the upper end of the body. The latter is a paddy or wheat stalk measuring about 20 cm in length, cut just under a node so that the upper end is closed. Two to four slits are then made in the body a little lower than the node, functioning as reeds by which the sound is produced when the player puts the upper end into his mouth and blows into the slits. While playing, the hands of the musician circle the lower end of the body in order to make the sound resonate. It is a favourite among children who make it by themselves and play it in great numbers at transplanting and harvesting times, either in solo or group performances.

## b) Flutes

Flutes, mainly bamboo of mono-tubular type, are used in great numbers among the Hani. The great majority of them are vertically held flutes (*dzapi*) although transverse flutes, very common everywhere in China, are also used. More noticeable is the existence of a bamboo recorder (*tixe*) among the Hani of Jiangcheng, as this instrument is practically non-existent elsewhere in China. The body, measuring 30 cm with four holes, has a mouthpiece made of a block of wax held by two bamboo sticks. Its role is to deviate the air flow and to cast it against the thin edge of a bamboo slice inserted just below a rectangular hole that is pierced a little lower on the body of the instrument. A second remarkable type is the vertical nose flute of the Yichē subgroup, played by practising circular breathing. All flutes are male instruments made to be played outside and, like oboes, are frequently used by young men in courtship.

## c) Horns and Trumpets

Horns made of buffalo horns or bamboo are traditional instruments used by the Hani for calling, announcing guests coming from distant villages, coordinating collective works in the fields or, formerly, as war signals. The use of tree leaves as vegetal horns, or trumpets, is certainly the greatest originality of Hani musical instrumentation. The instrument, called *gobe*, *gubi* or *maetshü-(a)pa*, is usually made from the leaf of the spiked gingerlily (*Hedychium spicatum*, Hani: *mae-(a)pa*), or the Japanese banana tree (*Musa basjoo* Sieb. et Zucc) cultivated near pondfields not for its fruits but for medicinal purposes. The leaf is rolled by hand into a conical shape, the musician blowing into the narrow end, producing a rather low-pitched sound. The sound being simply produced by the vibrations of the lips and made to resound by means of the hands clasping the lower end, the instrument offers great potential for modulation, glissandos and vibratos, with a typical tone of horn. A legend wide-spread in the

Ailao mountains relates how a woman first got the idea of inventing such an instrument after her husband had been killed at war. Having kept on crying for seven days and nights she lost her voice, so she had this idea of making an instrument out of a leaf that could be used as a substitute to express her lamentations. The villagers, hearing that very special sound evoking a human cry, were deeply moved and soon started imitating the girl by making their own instruments. The *gobe* is exclusively used by girls and women in their play and to accompany some religious ceremonies and ritual dancing. As for the leaf used by boys, the range of melodies is limited although the tunes are usually longer.

## String Instruments

### a) Plucked string instruments

The Hani three-string lute resembles the Chinese *saxian* and bears the same name (*sa(n)xye(n)*). It has a shallow cylindrical body made of hard wood, both sides of which are covered with snake skin or, in one type (*thingë-dzëli*) in use among the Piyo subgroup of Mojiang, made from scales surrounding young bamboo stems which are dried and assembled together. The instrument also has a long flat neck, ending with an curved scroll, often carved, into which are inserted four lateral tuning pegs. On the neck no frets are made, so the pitch of tones may be freely decided. The three strings, tuned so as to produce successively a fourth and a fifth, or a fifth and a fourth (most commonly A1-D1-A2, D1-A2-D2, or C1-F1-C2), are played with nails or with a plectrum (*laomyane*) made of the stone of some chestnut tree (*laomya-(a)dzö*). Strings are usually plucked, not bowed, except for one very small type of lute played by Akhas in Xishuangbanna, made of a single piece of wood measuring 10-15 cm in length which can be either plucked or bowed, the strings of the bow passing under the strings of the instrument. Among the Hani, bows are most often made of horse tail (*maokao*) or of vegetal fibers obtained by using the sword-shaped leaves of the

Sisal Agave (*Agave sisalana*, Perrine, *Agavaceae*; Hani: *laxe*) that have been kept macerating in water for two weeks. The three string-lute accompanies a lead voice or alternatively is played with a vocal solo. When played the musician is seated, the instrument being set up in upright position on one knee, held in the left hand while strings are plucked alternatively by the nail of the index finger of the right hand.

A very unusual type of string instrument played by the Hani is the *hadē*, in use among the Duoni subgroup of Jinping district. It is made simply by stretching three or four strings between the fingers of one hand, which are then plucked by nails or plectrums. Lacking a permanent body and neck, the *hadē* is tuned approximately as other Chinese string instruments using a succession of fourths and fifths (for instance C1, F1, C2), and is usually played by men while accompanying vocal solos.

The Hani four-string lute (*xaothuu*) is similar to the Chinese "moon shaped" lute (*yueqin*), having the same wooden shallow circular shaped body with the flat sides both covered with wood, and a short neck bearing a curved and frequently carved scroll. The table board, often decorated with paintings, and the back, are also made of wood, different species being suitable and used according to the resources locally available. The strings, made of the vegetal fiber extracted from the Sisal Agave (*Agave sisalana*) are frequently tuned in D2, D2, A3, A3. They are stretched over the neck by four thin lateral tuning pegs and, at the bottom of the instrument, on the bridge. On the neck are made nine frets, of which three are located on the finger board and six on the table board, thus defining the fixed scale of the instrument. The four-string lute, like the other string instruments of the Hani, is a male instrument. While playing, the body lays on the player's thighs, the neck being held in a slanting upright position. Plucking is done by the right hand, using nails or a plectrum (*xaothuu-labö*, *nyuka-labö*) made out of cattle horn. As for the Chinese *yueqin*

only the two highest-pitched strings ordinarily play the melody while the two lower strings serve to mark tempo counterpoints. Two strings are also frequently played together so as to make intervals of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>. The four-string lute can be played in solo performances or used to accompany singing and dancing. In the latter case the hollowed body of the instrument is often slapped, conveying the festive atmosphere of songs and dances.

A third major type of plucked string instruments used by the Hani is a three or four-string long-neck lute, measuring approximately 70 cm in length, and differing from other lutes mainly in the shape of the body. The instrument is a favourite in the western part of the Ailao range, especially among the Piyo subgroup of Mojiang. Its body is made of a half-rounded piece of hollowed trunk of a wild species of mulberry tree (*Morus sp.*), while the table board is made of a thin board of the Chinese *Aralia* (*Aralia chinensis*) that is studded to the body. A legend among the Hani of that area tells how a young hero first made the instrument for his beloved by imitating the shape of a cow's leg. As a matter of fact the shape of the body of the instrument evokes a cow-leg while the shape of the scroll evokes a cow's hoof. The instrument is used in particular to accompany songs and dances at harvest times.

#### b) String Instruments

The Hani fiddle (*tshiwu*) is of the same type as the Chinese *er-hu*, and seems to have been recently introduced among the Hani by Han people, especially after 1950. Like its Chinese counterpart it has an hexagonal or octagonal barrel-shaped body made of hard wood whose height is larger than its diameter. The table board is covered by lizard or snake skin while a long neck, often of bamboo, passes through the body. Its slightly curved head bears two arrow-shaped tuning pegs whose bodies bear slanting entails so as to facilitate the tuning. Two strings, tuned in the fourth (most often A2-D2), run from the lower extremity of the neck



located under the body, pass over a bridge and join the tuning pegs. Due to the length of the lateral tuning pegs, the strings tend to deviate from the axis of the neck, so a ring located approximately in its middle part helps to maintain the strings parallel to the neck. The instrument is played with a bow whose strings made of horse tail (*maokao*), pass under the strings, as in Chinese fiddle. The musician plays while seated, his instrument being set up on his knees. The two strings are simultaneously bowed while the fingers of the left hand simply touch them on the neck, without exerting any significant pressure as frets are lacking on the instrument. Despite the small size of the body the sound is rather low-pitched. The play of the left hand is marked by frequent effects of vibratos and glissandos which are also a characteristic of the Chinese *er-hu*.

#### *Percussion instruments*

Percussion instruments include several types of wooden "ankle bells" associated with dancing music, especially musical wooden or bamboo pestles used as dancing bells attached around the ankle, or wooden ankle bracelet which are tight around the legs, all of them being used in collective playing and group dancing. Larger bamboo sections held in an upright position and struck against the ground by an ensemble of girls are part of the funeral dancing. Instrumental ensemble music often uses Chinese cymbals of small and medium size, either of the flat type equivalent to the Chinese *bo*, or with a round protruding central part (equivalent to the *nao*), held with strings attached to the center of the metal disc. Other small percussion instruments used in ensemble music include miniature slit drums hollowed out from sections of tree trunks, cylindrical or octagonal in shape, which are beaten with mallets.

The Hani also possess several kinds of Jew's harps although they do not appear to be common. The instruments, which are mainly idioglottal and made from bamboo, may have several vibrating lamellas resonating in the mouth, as among the neighbouring Yi. They are mainly used in solo performances.

Hani drums (*xudu*) are of two main types: the first one is a one-membrane cylindrical type, made of a hollowed hard-wood tubular cylinder. One face is covered with cattle hide as drumhead, the skin being stuck to the wood on the edges and tied up with a circling of grass or bamboo. Tension and tuning are ensured by hammering this vegetal circling which, by moving closer to the center of the body, stretches the skin. The other type is a two-membrane barrel like drum made of the same materials, the two membranes being attached and stretched together over the body by means of cattle bowels or skin. Hani drums, which produce sounds in the mid-lower register, are essentially beaten by the hands, or in a few cases, with one or two wooden mallets. In the latter case the musician holds the instrument in the left hand while beating or holding one mallet in the right hand. Ordinarily, dances are not accompanied by any melodious instrumental music, but only by the striking of gongs and drums which keep the dancing in pace; therefore drumming in itself is also often associated with dancing and singing. Gongs (*bölö*) used among the Hani all have a protruding central part, this type being typical of South Chinese ethnic groups and more specifically members of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. Gongs exist in different dimensions but are generally of small and medium size, not exceeding 40 cm in diameter. While being played, the instrument is held by hand or suspended by a bridle held in the left hand and beaten in its center with a mallet. Gongs suspended horizontally on wooden frames, probably borrowed from Han people, are sometimes encountered in ensemble music, although not commonly.

### *Ritual uses of percussion instruments*

In the culture of the Hani, as of many people in Yunnan and more generally the Eastern Himalayan region, the drum and the gong are much more than mere musical instruments. As a matter of fact gongs and drums kept collectively in one village cannot be struck or even touched in normal times, but only used by religious officials or their assistants in ceremonial rituals. For the Hani consider them as sacred wares having the power to transmit information and prayers to the gods. Gongs are kept in pairs in the village priest's house (*Migu*) as an essential element of the paraphernalia used for collective rituals. On such occasions the two instruments play a key role in relaying communication between humans and spirits during collective rituals. At burial time, for instance, gongs and drums are struck profoundly in order to send the dead's soul to the place where its ancestors lived. Collective prayers addressed to the sky god or gods of the soil are also often initiated by a formal striking of the gong, to call the gods as well as for conveying human messages and prayers. Drums and gongs also have a protective function resulting from their ability to expel evil forces. The founding of a new village, taking the corpse from the house to the burial ground, purifying the village on the seventh lunar month, are all ritual activities for which the beating of percussion instruments is requested in order to drive off spirits. That expulsive power attributed to gongs and drums is furthermore reflected in the Hani mythology under the traits of the legendary hero Alo, represented as using his belly as a drum to kill malevolent demons<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> A similar association is found in the mythology of the Jinuo, another Tibeto-Burman speaking people of Yunnan, through the story of a hero who, after having defeated and killed a devil, used its skin for his drumhead and its big bones for his drumsticks.

A third prominent feature of religious beliefs attached to percussion instruments is their close association with chthonian cults and the general idea of fertility. The Hani, with some other minority groups as the Lahu and the Wa, differentiate their ritual percussion instruments into male and female ones. Among the Hani, it is the gong, more frequently than the drum, which is differentiated into *epa* (male) and *ema* (female) types. The female type often bears two small protuberances thought to represent human breasts, while the male one has only one in the center that is assimilated to the male genital organs. When beaten, male gongs also produce a lower sound than female ones, on the model of the human voice. In some places, as among members of the Xalo subgroup, the sexual differentiation is made between the gong and the drum, the former being considered as male and the latter as female. The gong itself (or in some places the drum) is further venerated as a divinity, being thought of as a lucky charm having the power to ensure the multiplication of humans and cattle, lots of food when hunting, bumper harvests.

The association of percussion instruments with the idea of fertility is most clearly apparent in the set of rituals of the New Year festival that takes place around the winter solstice in some places or shortly before sowing time in others, and lasts three days. On the first day the gong and the drum cannot be struck, but from the second day on they are collectively played by the "pure men" (*tso-sao*) of the village community while accompanying a series of ritual dances. The striking of the gong is first initiated by the village priest (*Migu*) who presides over a banquet rallying all household heads. The *Migu* first drops wine into the two male and female gongs (or the gong and the drum), beginning with the female one. In some places, when addressing prayers to the sky god, the village priest also puts inside the gong (or drum) various species of grains and green grass taken as symbols for the prosperity of human beings and cattle, hoping that the drum, being satisfied, will bestow whatever man prays for. He then

strikes the female gong three times, meaning that the ceremony is over and the dancing can start. Suddenly a dozen or so young men sound gongs and strike drums, while dancing. Gongs and drums provide repetitious, duple and strongly accented rhythmic patterns that continue for long periods unchanged in form and style. The dancing action mainly consists of imitations of ritual gestures (sacrificing, kneeling down, standing reversely), but also gestures associated with hunting and agriculture (searching for animal footprints, walking forwards and backwards as if clearing a field, and so on) which respectively identify male and female activities.

This calls for an explanation. Drums are clearly associated in several myths with hunting (i.e. male activity), and more specifically collective hunting. One of them relates how, in ancient times, a group of hunters got a large quantity of game attracting the animals by the beating of drums. But in the specific context of the New Year festival, the association of gong and drum is further embedded with the idea of fertility through the combination of male and female principles. Members of the Xalo subgroup of Yuanyang, for instance, explicitly say that the playing of gong and drum symbolizes "the union of the couple", and indeed in many places the collective dancing first starts with a ritual "parade dancing" of the male and female gongs held by the village priest and his assistant, during which the two instruments are ceremoniously presented to each other. Human fertility is itself linked with the fertility of the soil, and so drumming and sounding the gong and dancing naturally become ways of ensuring good crops for the new agricultural cycle to begin. Members of the Lopi subgroup of Jianshui area say for instance that when beaten the sound of the drum "touches" the earth, while members of the Yichē subgroup estimate that he who dances best will also get the best harvest. Lastly, when collective dancing takes place, the gong-gong intercourse becomes a man-drum intercourse as young men occasionally stand facing a drum simulating mating

actions. The dance then becomes a symbolic way of having intercourse with the Earth<sup>5</sup>.

Villagers then rely on their gongs and drums for ensuring the general welfare of their domain for the beginning year, making the two instruments the most sacred vessels of their community without which no prosperity is obtainable. As the saying goes:

"Happiness in the village depends on the drums and gongs  
as happiness in the household depends on the parents"

(*Pusa-sa-e ludu bōlō tshi dzao, Xosa-sa zo dama ni xa*).

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<sup>5</sup>The Yi people of Shiping district, on the northern bank of the Red River, express a parallel idea in a festival taking place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month, the drum dance involved being similarly thought as a symbolic way of having sexual intercourse with a divinity, here the local "Mother Hill". The local people consider their mountain divinity as a female horse in metamorphosis. Every year in ancient times, when the female horse was at puberty, it neighed terribly for a mate. The ancestors of the Yi people who lived at the foot of the mountain tried to quench her desire by dancing upon the hill. They made huge drums with cattle hide as drumheads to accompany the dance. This was a complete success as the female horse no longer neighed, and also marked the beginning of their festival of stepping on the mountain. As for the drum dance of the Hani, it is generally thought that the more energetically people dance, the better the harvest will be.

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