

# WAYS OF SINGING IN NAPO COUNTY (GUANGXI ZHUANG AUTONOMOUS REGION) AND IN FUNING COUNTY (YUNNAN PROVINCE)

Lin Zhi [林芝]

Guangxi Arts University, contact: [380075515@qq.com](mailto:380075515@qq.com)

## Abstract

Songs have their specific circulation area in the process of their development. Due to the geographical background, local language dialects, and varying social background, the style and characteristics of songs in various places are revealing specific characteristics. The lyrics of these songs are based on the people's spoken dialects. Therefore, various dialects' voices, the ways of making them sound, local accents, terms used and exclamations, have been brought into these songs, thereby forming regional differences of songs to some extent.

This study is based on intense field work undertaken in the past few years. It deals with ways of singing in Napo County and Funing County in the South of China.

## Keywords

Singing practice, field work, Zhuang, Guangxi, Yunnan

## WAYS OF SINGING

The songs of the Zhuang people in Napo and Funing counties are performed without instrumental accompaniment. Under usual circumstances as far as it is known, most of them are in the way of male and female alternating singing, solo singing, repetitive singing, and joint singing of some more people together. When singing alternately, the number can be one man and one woman, two men and two women, or more men and more women. When singing, one party sings a text first and the other sings it again, so the song is continued through many repetitions. Before the 1960s, the Zhuang people held solemn song festivals in their fields. Today, the Zhuang songs mostly appear in organized seasonal festivals, singing competitions and other activities organized by the government or the respective communities. Most of the singers stand while singing and are performing towards the audience. But in their leisure time, the singers may stand, sit, or squat comfortably. The following table illustrates the different positions:

Locality (地方)	[Type]	Song title	Way of singing
那坡县 Napo	单声部 Single voice	[luən <sup>4</sup> ʔja:ŋ <sup>1</sup> ] luenx yang 论央	男女对唱, 少数独唱; 亦可男女双方相等人数 (二至六人) 齐唱的对唱形式, 但较少见。  In the centre alternating singing males, a few soloists; an alternating singing of equal numbers of performers (two to six) by both men and women. Very rare.
	双声部 Two voices	[θei <sup>1</sup> rai <sup>6</sup> ] sei reih 诗上甲	对唱, 多为两男二重与两女二重的人员编制; 非正式场合可仅同声重唱的形式, 人员编制可两人重唱, 也可一人高声部、两人低声部的组合形式。

			The first part of the sung poem is with alternating singers, usually by two men and two women. The informal arrangement can only be performed in the same voice. It is combining either two people, or one person with a high voice and two with a low voice.
		[θei¹ na²] sei naz 诗下甲	男女对唱，双方人员声部组合形式有同声二重唱与同声合唱两种。同声合唱时一人演唱高声部，两人或以上（上至可达三十人）演唱低声部。  The lyrics are expressed in the singing of two men and women who sing together. The voices of the two sides can be combined in two ways: joint singing and joint chorus, in which one person sings the high voice, and two or more (up to 30 people) sing a low voice.
富宁县 Funing	单声部 Single voice	[fu:n¹ ʔja:ŋ¹] fwen yang 吩央	男女对唱，少数独唱；亦可男女双方相等人数（二至六人）齐唱的对唱形式，但较少见。  Fenyang is alternating singing between male and female. Some are sung as solo. It is also possible to sing with equal numbers of singers (two to six), but it is rare.
		[fu:n¹ ə⁰ ei⁰] fwen wei 吩呢哎	对唱、齐唱、独唱等三种形式均有。对唱时一方为主要旋律演唱者，另一方起到短暂承接作用。齐唱一般为二到三人。  There are three ways: alternating singing, more singers in a single voice, or a solo performance. During the singing, one leads the main melody, and the other side sings a short phrase. When singing together, there are usually two to three singers.
		[fu:n¹ ŋa¹ wi³] fwen nga rij 吩丫玉	多数为独唱，亦可齐唱  Most ways of singing are as solo, but there can be more singers performing in one voice.
		[fu:n¹ ta⁶ la:u⁴] fwen dah laux 吩打劳	独唱  Solo singing
	双声部 Two voices	[fu:n¹ the:n¹ pa:u³] fwen dien bauj 吩天保上甲	男女对唱，各方最少为两人，最多八人，由一人唱高声部，其余唱低声部；休闲联系时可二重唱。  The first part of the Fen Tianbao is a pair of alternating singings between male and female. There is a minimum of two parties and a maximum of eight parties joining. One person sings the high voice and the rest sings the low voice. The alternating singing can be used for casual contact making.
		[fu:n¹ the:n¹ pa:u³] fwen dien bauj 吩天保下甲	男女对唱，最少三人，最多十人，由一人唱高声部，其余唱低声部；休闲联系时可重唱，最少三人，一人高声部，两人低声部。  The first part of the lyrics is sung alternately by male and female singers, at least three people, at most ten people, one person sings the high voice, the rest sings the low voice. It can be changed at leisure times, at least three people, one high voice, two low voices.

FIGURE 1: Table of different ways of singing songs of the Zhuang people (Scheme by the author).

## SPECIFIC SONG FEATURES IN NAPO COUNTY

“论央” [luən<sup>4</sup> ʔja:ŋ<sup>1</sup>]: This tune is sung with a wide range of frequencies and a combination of so-called true and false sounds, which is characterized by requiring the singer to have a long breath and leaving no traces of secretly breathing. When singing in high pitches, the head cavity resonance and chest cavity resonance are mostly used to make the sound extremely tension-bearing and elastic. When singing the ending phrases, the singer often uses ‘false voice’ to slide up or down. "Lunyang" has a free and complex rhythm, and often uses a variety of micro-melodic patterns such as vibrato, tied tones through slides, and other micro-melodic elements, which are possibly decorative through changes.

“诗上甲” [θei<sup>1</sup> rai<sup>6</sup>]: The melody is and the rhythm is clear. The entire song is short. Usually, only two main beats are used to open the song. The pitch range is narrow. Trills are occasionally used, possibly to decorate the melodic space.

“诗下甲” [θei<sup>1</sup> na<sup>2</sup>]: In the melody, the pitches are modified through slides and glides, resulting in different effects of coloring the song. Generally speaking, the real voice is used for singing, the male voice is louder, the female voice is moderate, and the tone is soft, forming a clear auditory effect.

## SPECIFIC SONG FEATURES IN FUNING COUNTY

“吩央” [fu:n<sup>1</sup> ʔja:ŋ<sup>1</sup>]: This melody has a fully used and high-pitched wider singing range that can carry over a long distance, and is characterized by a relatively long last part. Singing often uses real voices, and frequently alternates with false voices. There are three vocal techniques of expressing a rising, a middle and a low pitch, which are used to set the language tone. The way of singing depends on it.

“吩呢哎” [fu:n<sup>1</sup> ə<sup>0</sup> ei<sup>0</sup>]: This kind of tune is simple and straight forward, with a strong piercing sound. It has very high requirements on the singer's technical skills and breath control. It is a longer lasting song. Its characteristics are seen in the fact that the singer needs to alternate between true and false voices without breaking apart. When using real voice, the singer must have a strong and full tone, when the voice is false, the tone is clean and bright. The song also uses a large number of micro-melodic patterns, probably as decoration, such as titling pitches, vibrato, and tied tones. The singer needs to interpret them carefully and coherently. Because such tunes are rather free, the rhythm is not regular, and there is a certain freedom of rhythmic shapes. The time value changes according to the singer's state of mind and other factors. It also reflects on the skills of the singer's breath.

“吩丫玉” [fu:n<sup>1</sup> ŋa<sup>1</sup> wi<sup>3</sup>]: The title means something like "Mountain Spring Tune". As the name suggests, this kind of tune is relatively gentle, the melody stretches in a soothing way, calm and leisurely, and it is often used to alternate between true and false voice when singing, like a stream flowing through the mountains. Smart, like a drop of water evoking ripples.

“吩打劳” [fu:n<sup>1</sup> ta<sup>6</sup> la:u<sup>4</sup>]: This kind of tune is divided into "Undressing Lao Fen Lao" and "A Fei Fing Laou". Light and smooth, often used to sing love songs, its melody structure is relatively independent, easy to teach and easy to sing.

“吩天保上甲” [fu:n<sup>1</sup> the:n<sup>1</sup> pa:u<sup>3</sup>]: This tune is high-pitched, with strong penetrating power, many long tones, and a simple rhythm in short phrasings. It is characterized by the use of the throat vibrato when singing in high-pitches to identify the upper and lower part.

“吩天保下甲” [fu:n<sup>1</sup> the:n<sup>1</sup> pa:u<sup>3</sup>]: The lower armour tune is pitch-wise lower than the upper armour, and the melody is smooth and lasting longer. It is sung with more real voices, clear straight words, a more decisive melody and less large melodic jumps.

Each way of singing in Zhuang songs has its own technicalities and characteristics. However, in general, in the singing method, the songs of the two places selected above use more real and false sounds alternately. In the song, Napo 's “Lunyang”[ 论央] has a certain similarity with Funing's “Fenyang”[ 吩央]; Napo 's “Poem on the Apocalypse (Shi Shangjia/Poems of Shangjia)”[ 诗上甲] and “Poem on the Bottom of the Poem (Shi Xiajia/Poems of Xiajia)”[ 诗下甲] and Funing 's “Fentianbao on the Apocalypse (Fentianbao Shangjia)”[ 吩天保上甲] and “Fentianbao on the Apotheosis (Fentianbao Xiajia)”[ 吩天保下甲] are certainly similar.

## PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE TUNES

The types of the “论央” [lu:n<sup>4</sup> ʔja:ŋ<sup>1</sup>] include high [ka:u<sup>5</sup> tha:n<sup>2</sup>], middle [tsuŋ<sup>5</sup> tha:n<sup>2</sup>], and low [ti<sup>5</sup> tha:n<sup>2</sup>] registers. Among them, the low [ti<sup>5</sup> tha:n<sup>2</sup>] also includes the irregular register [luən<sup>4</sup> tha:n<sup>2</sup>]. Regarding the names of the tunes described above, the Zhuang language is expressed using Mandarin of Southwestern China. There is no special Zhuang language term, but the description and naming can be understood in Zhuang language.

Interview time: 6 February, 2018

Interview location: Office of Culture, Sports, Radio and Television, Bureau of Napo County

Interview form: Individual interview, open

Basic information of the interviewees: Luo Jingchao, male, born October 1958, Zhuang, attached to the program on the national intangible cultural heritage “Napo Zhuang People's Songs”

Interview content:

Author: Hello, Mr. Luo! I saw in the book that the starting tunes of Napo 's "theory of centralism" are high, middle and low registers, and there are also irregular registers, right?

Luo: Yes, the high one is a mountain cave. To go to the (high) place means to sing suŋ<sup>1</sup> suŋ<sup>1</sup> pai<sup>1</sup> (high).

Author: What about the middle and low registers?

Luo: The low one is for tsam<sup>1</sup> tsam<sup>1</sup> ke:m<sup>1</sup> kwa<sup>5</sup> pai<sup>1</sup> (follow it slowly), and then ʔju<sup>5</sup> tam<sup>5</sup> tam<sup>5</sup> khən<sup>3</sup> pai<sup>1</sup> thəŋ<sup>1</sup> tiŋ<sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ<sup>1</sup>, tiŋ<sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ<sup>1</sup> joukh khən<sup>3</sup> pai<sup>1</sup> thəŋ<sup>1</sup> suŋ<sup>1</sup> suŋ<sup>1</sup> pai<sup>1</sup> (Those are in the middle section, and then they rise to a high place in the middle section).

Author: What about the middle register?

Luo: The middle one is for tiŋ<sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ<sup>1</sup> (middle). At ti:ŋ<sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ<sup>1</sup> khən<sup>3</sup> pai<sup>1</sup> tiŋ<sup>2</sup> suŋ<sup>1</sup> (up to the middle), this is the middle register.

Author: What about the irregular one?

Luo: The irregular one is considered within the low register.

Author: Are they exactly the same?

Luo: No, what should I say? It is lower than the low-key (altar) and tam<sup>5</sup> (low). For example, the two of us sat on the bench and sang together, and then we started to sing very little. Just like this (humming a short sentence).

Author: Thank you Mr. Luo. So how do I say in Zhuang language high, middle, low, and irregular register?

Luo: Oh, I don't know how to say this. We usually say it in Mandarin. We all say it that way.

Author: How do I understand it in Zhuang language?

Luo: The high register is tsei<sup>4</sup> suŋ<sup>1</sup> (highest), meaning the mountain cavity, the low is tsam<sup>1</sup> tsam<sup>1</sup> tam<sup>5</sup> tam<sup>5</sup> ke:m<sup>1</sup> kwa<sup>5</sup> pai<sup>1</sup> (following slowly), the middle register is ʔju<sup>5</sup> tiŋ<sup>2</sup> kja:n<sup>1</sup> khən<sup>3</sup> tiŋ<sup>2</sup> suŋ<sup>1</sup> pai<sup>1</sup> (rise in the middle and going to the high place), the irregular register also belongs to the low altar, but it is tsei<sup>4</sup> tam<sup>5</sup> tsei<sup>4</sup> tam<sup>5</sup> (low and lowest).

Author: What is the Chinese character for "tha:n<sup>5</sup>"?

Luo: There is no (Chinese) character. The upper (high) register is the high pitch, the middle register serves the middle pitch, the low register is the bass, and the irregular register is an even lower pitch. For example, in the past, at home, from nine to midnight to eleven and twelve at night, we sang the middle register, and then at twelve thirty, one o'clock in the middle of the night, we started singing the irregular one. The voice will sing low, because there are elderly people in the family going to sleep. We cannot disturb the elderly's sleep. So, we do not let them hear, so I sing in an irregular register. The irregular register is sung like this. The old houses were made of wood. When the guests came to sing, they let the guests sit in the back room. We sat in the hall, sat down on the bench, and then they people were leaning against the wooden wall panels of the back room. They sing, others listen to them, and then we answer, rather quietly.

Author: So, you did not meet while performing the song?

Luo: No, there is no meeting. It's going across the wall. Then, it would have been time for supper, which was more than three o'clock in the middle of the night, so we invited people in the back room to have supper. At this time, they came out, and when they came out, the sound started to rise a little bit, but this time it wasn't too much, or too low. After eating supper, the guests went back inside, at this time they continued to sing and others started singing back to that irregularly. I sang this way and sang until I looked up at the sky. When the sky was bright, about six o'clock in the morning, we started singing the middle register. At that time during the rule of the Kuomintang (as experienced from the old society), there were no electric lights, no clocks, therefore, we only looked at the sky. At this time, the old man started to get up. After getting up, we went to boil (pork rice), bring water, grind rice, feed chicken, etc., we sang the middle register. At that time, we were ready to go back, we went to the gate, ready to go home to sleep, and began to sing high register, sing love songs, sing lu:n<sup>4</sup> pja:k<sup>8</sup> (parting song), ready to separate, that is the kind of "high mountain cave". At the time of the Spring Festival, there was too much rain and it was too cold. It was quite tiring to sing a night. There was a day to go home to sleep. If they still see guests from outside the village at night, those people may continue to sing with the guests at night.

Author: Thank you Luo. Which Chinese character do you think the "tha:n<sup>5</sup>" character is best?

Luo: If you want to write, I think it's better to write the "talk" next to the words.

Author: Are you talking about "talking"?

Luo: Yes, the "talk" of the conversation. We can understand everything we write."

From the above materials, the author believes that in addition to the role of high, middle, low, and irregular register, singing songs also includes two aspects of the singer's environment when singing, and the aesthetic standards established by Zhuang people. Mainly, singing songs also reflects on the etiquette and customs of the Zhuang songs: 'respecting the elderly' and 'respecting the guests.' The interview presented above can be taken as an example. In the

following, the author summarizes the verbal understanding of the "Lunyang" tune as shown in the table below:

Named as	Phonetic appearance	alias	Oral characteristics		Environment
			Zhuang (phonetic transcript)	Chinese translation	
High register	ka:u <sup>5</sup> tha:n <sup>2</sup>	shàng tán gāoyīn 上坛高音	1、suŋ <sup>1</sup> suŋ <sup>1</sup> pai <sup>1</sup> 2、tsei <sup>4</sup> suŋ <sup>1</sup>	1、高高的 2、最高	第二天早上走出大门，返程唱“别离歌”的时候 The next morning, when I walked out the door and sang "Farewell Song" on the way back.
Middle register	tsuŋ <sup>5</sup> tha:n <sup>2</sup>	zhōngyīn 中音	1、tiŋ <sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ <sup>1</sup> 2、tiŋ <sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ <sup>1</sup> khən <sup>3</sup> pai <sup>1</sup> tiŋ <sup>2</sup> suŋ <sup>1</sup> 3、ʔju <sup>5</sup> tiŋ <sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ <sup>1</sup> khən <sup>3</sup> tiŋ <sup>2</sup> suŋ <sup>1</sup> pai <sup>1</sup>	1、中间 2、中间升到高处 3、在中间上升到高处	1、晚上九点多到半夜十一时、十二时在家中 2、次日天蒙蒙亮，大概六点钟左右，老人起床干家务活的时候 1. 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. and 12:00 p.m. at home. 2. The next day, at dawn, around six o'clock, when the old man got up to do his chores
Low register	ti <sup>5</sup> tha:n <sup>2</sup>	dīyīn 低音	1、tsam <sup>1</sup> tsam <sup>1</sup> ke:m <sup>1</sup> kwa <sup>5</sup> pai <sup>1</sup> , ʔju <sup>5</sup> tam <sup>5</sup> tam <sup>5</sup> khən <sup>3</sup> pai <sup>1</sup> thəŋ <sup>1</sup> tiŋ <sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ <sup>1</sup> , tiŋ <sup>2</sup> kja:ŋ <sup>1</sup> jəu <sup>6</sup> khən <sup>3</sup> pai <sup>1</sup> thəŋ <sup>1</sup> suŋ <sup>1</sup> suŋ <sup>1</sup> pai <sup>1</sup> 2、tsam <sup>1</sup> tsam <sup>1</sup> tam <sup>5</sup> tam <sup>5</sup> ke:m <sup>1</sup> kwa <sup>5</sup> pai <sup>1</sup>	1、慢慢地跟过去，在很低的地方升到中间段，然后在中间段又升到很高的地方 2、慢慢地、低低地跟去	半夜三点左右夜宵时间，客人从里屋向厅堂走出来的时候，声音既不太中，也不算太低 At about three o'clock in the middle of the night, when the guests came out of the inner room toward the hall, the sound was neither too moderate nor too low
Irregular register	luən <sup>4</sup> tha:n <sup>2</sup>	Zuidīyīn 最低音	tsei <sup>4</sup> tam <sup>5</sup> tsei <sup>4</sup> tam <sup>5</sup>	最低最低	1、半夜十二点半、一点老人睡觉时，部分歌手在厅堂，部分歌手在里屋，隔着木头墙板 2、半夜三点钟，客人吃完夜宵回到里屋坐下后 1. At 12:30 or 1:00 in the morning when the old people are sleeping, some singers are in the hall and some singers are in the inner room, sung through the wooden wall panels 2、At 3 o'clock in the middle of the night, after the guests have eaten their nightly snack, then going back to the inside room and sit down

FIGURE 2: Table about the situation of the "论央" Lunyang (Scheme by the author).

## SUMMARY

Based on the data collected during the field survey, the author has conducted research on Napo and Funing counties involved in this study and created a brief overview about the large diversity in singing techniques, opportunities, and contextual appearances at the time and in the spaces of observation. This can help improve understanding of historical patterns and recent developments toward another performance culture.

## LITERATURE RECOMMENDED

- Dictionary Editorial Office, Institute of Languages, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. 2013. *Dictionary of Modern Chinese (6th Edition)*. Beijing: Commercial Press.
- Guan Jianhua. 2013. *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Music*. Nanning: Nanning Normal University Press.
- Guangzhou Institute of Foreign Studies. 2010. *The Thai-Chinese Dictionary*. Beijing: Commercial Press.
- Li Fanggui. 2011. Li Fanggui's Complete Collection 8: A Handbook of Comparative Taiwanese. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press.
- Liang Min and Zhang Junru. 1996. *An Introduction to the Dong-Tai Language Group*. Beijing: China Social Science Press.
- Liang Min, Zhang Junru, et al. 1999. *A Study of Zhuang Dialects*. Chengdu: Sichuan Ethnic Press.
- Miao Jing and Qiao Jianzhong. 1985. On the Delineation of the Approximate Colour Zones of Han Folk Songs (Upper). *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, 1: 26-33.
- Napo County Bureau of Culture, Sports, Radio and Television. 2015. *Folk Songs of the Napo Zhuang People*. Nanning: Guangxi People's Publishing House.
- Rao Bingcai. 1983. *The Guangzhou Dictionary of Sounds*. Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press.
- Xu Hanmei. 2010. An Analysis of the Singing Voice of the Black-clad Zhuang Shan Song. Beijing. *China Music (Quarterly)*, 4: 186-189.
- Zhao Talimu. 2001. The Concept and Taxonomy of Folk Songs of the Central Asian Donggan People (upper). Beijing: *Journal of Chinese Academy of Music*, 1: 47-52.
- Zhou, Guowen, 2005. *Guixi Zhuang Folk Songs in Perspective*. Beijing: Popular Literature Press.

## REMARK

For more information about transcriptions, refer to international phonetic symbols for the Zhuang language.