

# The Impact of Western Scholars on the Music Education of the Jingpo Ethnic Group in Yunnan, China

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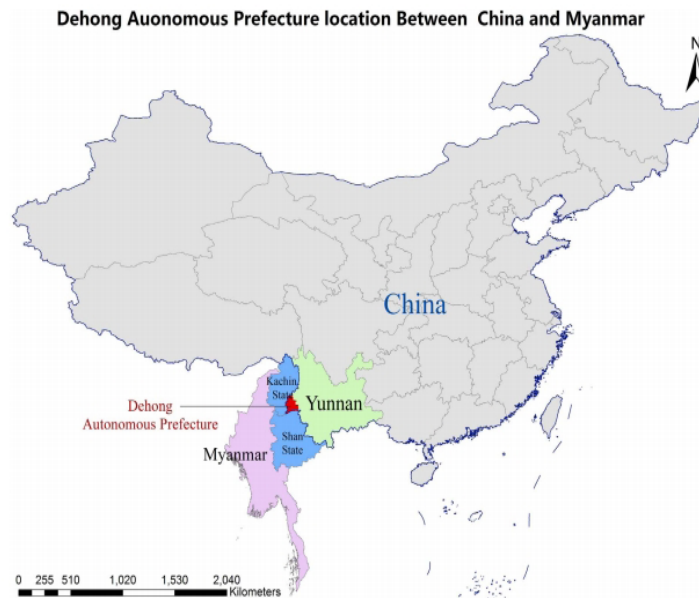
**Abstract:** This research attempts to uncover the influence of Western scholars' activities on music education in the Jingpo areas of Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in western Yunnan, China, during the early 20th century. The differences exist in the cultures, languages, and beliefs of the various ethnic groups in Yunnan. As such, systematic basic education is difficult to carry out in order, especially music education. However, this phenomenon changed in the early 20th century with the arrival of Western scholars. This study will analyze existing literature and data collected in fieldwork to trace the origins of Western music education in the Jingpo areas. In addition, the study intends to explore the localized and modernized music education model used by Western scholars for Jingpo. Furthermore, this research may help broaden the understanding of minority communities to the development of music education policies that precede the implementation of regulations. Additionally, it seeks to raise awareness of the music of ethnic minority groups worldwide and to achieve equality of musical education resources in ethnic minority areas as much as possible.

**Keywords:** Western music; Jingpo; Music education; Localization; Modernization

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## 1. Introduction

Yunnan is located in the southwest of China. Geographically, it borders Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Positioned at the intersection of partly South Asia and Southeast Asia, Chinese mainland, and Tibet, Yunnan has long been a hub for diverse cultural exchanges <sup>[1]</sup>. Due to historical and geographical reasons, in the early 20th century, China's regional economic development showed that the eastern coastal cities were stronger than the western inland cities, and the western regions, including Yunnan, which was generally in a relatively backward state <sup>[2]</sup>. Besides, the Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture (DAP) is situated in the westernmost part of Yunnan province. The DAP shares borders with Myanmar's Kachin state and Shan state in the southeast, southwest, and northwest (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1.** Map of Dehong Dai-Jing Autonomous Prefecture between China and Myanmar <sup>[3]</sup>

The Jingpo people are also known as the Kachin people in Myanmar <sup>[4]</sup>. These borders are connected by mountains and rivers, with the connectivity often depending on village locations. The main ethnic minorities living in DAP are Dai, Jingpo, A'chang, De'ang and Lisu, and the ethnic minority population accounts for 48% of the total population <sup>[5]</sup>. Among them, the Jingpo people are primarily found in Longchuan, Yingjiang, Luxi, Ruili, Lianghe, Wanding in DAP, Yunnan Province <sup>[6]</sup>. According to the 7th National Population Census in 2020, the Jingpo population amounts to 164,000 individuals, representing 0.34% of the province's total population <sup>[7]</sup>. Despite being a relatively small minority group in China, the Jingpo are the third-largest ethnic group in DAP.

Jingpo traditional music stands as a vital part of Chinese folk music. From a historical perspective, traditional Jingpo music is primarily passed down through oral tradition, which is not confined by time or location—it can be taught anywhere, from fields to courtyards. Additionally, because the Jingpo people lost their own writing system during the historical migration process, there are no written records of Jingpo traditional music <sup>[8]</sup>. Even until the end of the 19th century, there were no standardized places of education in the Jingpo areas, and let alone setting music classes specifically for students to learn from <sup>[9]</sup>. This phenomenon changed following the arrival of Western scholars who were from Myanmar in the early 20th century. The Western scholars ventured across the border from Myanmar into Yunnan and established several schools in the Jingpo areas of DAP. They developed localized and modernized Western music education methods suitable for Jingpo students based on ethnic characteristics, local political factors, and economic conditions at schools.

This research aims to delve into Western scholars' activities on the music education in Jingpo areas during the early 20th century by organizing the historical materials and data collected in the fieldwork. Specifically, the goal is to draw wider attention to ethnic minority music education, and highlight the necessity of localized music education methods among ethnic minorities around the world, not only China. This study thus seeks to inform and support the development of music education policies for ethnic minority groups.

## **2. Western music education in Jingpo areas**

### **2.1. Music education in schools established by Western scholars**

According to interviews during the fieldwork, these schools in Jingpo areas are generally divided into three grades: A, B, and C, and enroll students aged 6–12. The curriculum for lower-grade students primarily focused on the study of the Jingpo language and English, with a secondary emphasis on Burmese and literacy <sup>[10]</sup>. As for higher grade students, they were required to learn singing and some music-related knowledge <sup>[11]</sup>. In addition, the courses offered by church schools also include reading, arithmetic, and etiquette.

As music was included in the school curriculum, all Jingpo students learned to read music and sing in harmony. The Western music textbooks served as the principal instructive materials in the schools, which helped students become familiar with Western musical principles. One of the abilities acquired was that they could visually perceive and comprehend musical notation, including the principles of music such as the western musical staff, individual notes represented on the treble and bass clef, key signatures, and the solfege introduced by teachers.

In the early 20th century, Western scholars established schools in the Jingpo areas of DAP, which helped the Jingpo people transition from the stage of recording events, such as carving wood and calculating with beans, to modern education. Additionally, such development also opened up a new path for the inheritance of the traditional music of the Jingpo people. From a modern perspective, the music education that Western scholars gave to the Jingpo people in the early 20th century greatly accelerated the systematization, subjectification, and modernization of Jingpo music education.

### **2.2. Localized music education**

In the hundreds of years since the introduction of Western music into China, just like the history of Western music around the world, it has also witnessed a process of gradual localization. During this process, Western music education could not have survived and developed in China without localization. Similarly, localized music education could not have taken root and remained vital in China without resonating with the intellectual and emotional values of the Chinese nation.

#### **2.2.1. Jingpo writing system**

Originally, the Jingpo people did not have a writing system, so there was no history recorded in their own language, only oral folk legends. According to folk legends, the Jingpo people once had a writing system on cowhide, but they ate it out of hunger during the migration to the south. This legend also reflects the Jingpo people's psychological admiration for and desire to have a written language. The Jingpo writing system came into being around 1834, but the attempts of four Americans all ended in failure. It was not until 1890 that Ola Hanson created a total of 23 letters based on the Latin alphabet from more than 10,000 Jingpo words collected in Bhamo, Myanmar. Since then, the very first Latin-based Jingpo writing system was successfully created. Around 1914, the Latin-based Jingpo writing system was introduced into DAP. The emergence of the Jingpo writing system has brought the education of the Jingpo people to a new level and has also exerted a remarkable impact on music education.

#### **2.2.2. Music textbooks**

From the specific manifestation of the localization of Western music among ethnic minorities in Yunnan, it is first reflected that Western scholars used Western alphabets to create scripts for local ethnic groups, and

then compiled music notations through the ethnic scripts they created, such as the Pollard script notation and the Laiganu letter notation. These notations were then used to translate different music scores.

In the early days Western scholars entered the Jingpo areas, to make it easier for locals to sing, they tried their best to study and understand the local people’s musical traditions, behavior habits, and expression methods. In this way, they wanted to make full use of the culture they mastered and integrate it into their cause. One of the important strategies is that they have tried all kinds of ways to improve the original music scores based on five-line notation, to efficiently and conveniently popularize Western music.

In the early 1900s, two music textbooks were mainly utilized for music education in the Jingpo regions. The most widely used music textbook in Jingpo areas of Yunnan originated in Myitkyina, Myanmar <sup>[12]</sup>. This textbook was initially published in 1947, and the lyrics were written in the Latin-based Jingpo scripts. Ola Hanson translated over 400 songs during the early 20th century and composed more than 200 original songs. The words in this textbook were printed by the publishers known as “Hanson Memorial Press.” The music textbook also created by Ola Hanson, is the second textbook utilized in music instruction, and he rendered significant portions of the textbook into the Jingpo language. Furthermore, he produced a *Kachin-English Dictionary*, a spelling book, a primer, a grammar handbook, and a book on Jingpo Culture <sup>[13]</sup>. Until 1927, Ola Hanson and his colleagues had gathered and translated over 350 songs. After reviewing and organizing the music textbooks currently available in Jingpo areas of DAP, it has been determined that there are presently five distinct music textbooks with varying musical notations and languages (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Five hymnals used in Jingpo areas

Serial number	Language of lyrics	Notations	Voices	Amounts	Printing edition	Origin
1	Latin-based Jingpo Script	Staff	Polyphonic	402	Stereotype edition	Myanmar
2	Latin-based Jingpo Script	/	/	/	Stereotype edition	Myanmar
3	New Jingpo Script (After 1951)	Laiganu letter notation	Polyphonic	/	Mimeograph edition	Myanmar
4	Burmese	Staff & Laiganu letter notation	Polyphonic	/	Mimeograph edition	Myanmar
5	Chinese	Numbered notation	Monophonic	442	Stereotype edition	China

The first four textbooks listed in **Table 1** are predominantly utilized in Jingpo areas. Among these textbooks, those that use staff were more popular in the Jingpo areas than in other minority areas in Yunnan. It was followed by the Laiganu letter notation, which was known for its ease of learning. Besides, this notation shares the same structure as the Latin-based Jingpo writing system and works similarly to the tonic sol-fa employed in Europe. The Laiganu letter notation was regarded as an integral tool of Western scholars’ efforts to provide localized music education to the Jingpo people.

Western scholars generally let Jingpo people start with the easier-to-understand lyrics of Western songs before progressing to more complex content. In the early 20th century, the Western songs sung by Jingpo Christians mainly retained their original Western melodies and lyrics. After the Jingpo scripts were created, Western scholars found that changing English lyrics to the Jingpo scripts that were closer to the language habits of the Jingpo people would be more conducive to learning. The Western scholars translated the lyrics in the original Western songs into Jingpo scripts to keep the original meaning of the lyrics, which required the translators to be proficient in at least two languages. In addition, Jingpo people were also involved in the



translation process to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance. Another noteworthy feature is that to make the translated lyrics more acceptable to the Jingpo people, they also pay attention to absorbing some elements of Jingpo folk culture. Each song translated into Jingpo scripts lists the song's Jingpo title and lyrics, as well as the original English song name and the author's English name. Such an approach provides a good condition for further checking the source and conducting relevant research.

The preexisting music of Jingpo groups was based on the East Asian pentatonic. The Jingpo students encountered challenges when attempting to perform numerous Western songs due to the presence of unique half steps, particularly the seventh degree of the diatonic scale. To help Jingpo students quickly acquire Western music, Western scholars also introduced a modified approach to instruction that incorporated elements of their indigenous culture. Typically, Jingpo traditional melodies were expressed and set in standard duple meter, which was constructed around drumbeats. In most cases, Jingpo people faced the greatest difficulty with a triple meter. Frequently during performances, Jingpo people would modify songs in triple meter to conform to duple groupings, in accordance with their accustomed auditory preferences. The melody in the Jingpo songs usually varies in rhythm and speed to match the lyrics. The localized music education in minority communities is reflected in songs written in minority scripts.

### **2.2.3. Instruments and band**

Western music and instruments became a part of Jingpo people's daily life, festivals, and major ceremonies. For instance, the practice of Bronze Gong dancing is essential for the Jingpo people throughout many events, particularly housewarming celebrations. Going into details, Bronze Gong dancing is also known as "Tong Ga." As for this type of dancing, the accompanying instruments include bamboo flutes and snare drums introduced by Western scholars <sup>[14]</sup>. Under the influence of Western music, the beat and speed in the performance of these traditional instruments have also been switched more freely and improvisationally.

The Wenbang band originated in the 1930s. The establishment of the Wenbang band was strongly connected to the arrival of Western music into DAP during the early 20th century. "Wenbang" in the Jingpo language means "the fundamental basis of ceremonial practices," while in the context of music, it refers to "Jingpo ritual music." The band plays a diverse range of instruments, including both traditional and Western ones, such as the bamboo flute, cymbals, small gong, snare drums, and Scottish bagpipes. The fusion of Western instruments with traditional Jingpo instruments is also a typical means of localized Western music education.

### **2.3. Modernized music education**

Through the educational model of Western scholars, the Jingpo people developed a desire for civilization outside of the communities. Western scholars supported change and innovation and emphasized openness and diversity while embracing differences. There are traditional Jingpo songs with guitar accompaniment that incorporate elements of pop music. In some Jingpo songs composed by teenagers, young men and women perform with guitars.

The development process from tradition to modernity is continuous. Throughout development, it has gone through germination, development, and integration, and it is not divided by the border of two opposing powers. Therefore, it is difficult for us to define the modernization of Jingpo Western music education in absolute terms <sup>[15]</sup>.

Over the past 100 years, Western music education in the Jingpo areas of DAP has been influenced by

cultural changes and economic development. In the face of these factors, it has still been able to take root and develop in the Jingpo. It can be seen that the music education of the Jingpo carried out by Western scholars in the early 20th century was not just static, but was flexible according to ethnic and regional characteristics.

### 3. Conclusion

The influence of Western scholars' activities on music education in the Jingpo areas of DAP in the early 20th century was actually the embodiment of the integration of primitive ethnic minority culture and modern Western civilization. Western music was formed, survived, and developed in a special social formation in Jingpo communities. The social, ethnic, natural geographical environment and historical development conditions on which the Jingpo people depend for survival are more than complex, so Western music for Jingpo people is the product of the gathering, collision, and fusion of multiple cultures. Western scholars' activities on music education first helped the music education in the Jingpo of DAP to achieve localization and modernization in the first half of the 20th century, and then achieved preliminary globalization. More importantly, it allowed music education in this almost isolated mountainous area to be connected with the more advanced Western music education system of that time.

As for the origin and development of China's "new music" since the 20th century, most scholars have attributed it to school songs and the influence of music from Japan. However, at the same time as school songs were introduced to China in the early 20th century, Western music also took root in Yunnan, China. Whether in inland China or frontier minority areas, the foundation of Chinese "new music" by Western scholars is worthy of attention.

In conclusion, this study has identified the importance of Western scholars' activities on music education in Jingpo areas in the early 20th century. In particular, by probing into the fusion of Jingpo traditional music and Western music from a century ago, it links the study of traditional music education with the study of the localization, modernization, and globalization of modern music education in terms of methods and concepts. Moreover, it also encourages scholars to go beyond the initial focus on the excavation of ethnic folk music on the surface, and then pay attention to the changes of music caused by outside influence in the tide of historical development. Additionally, this study addresses a historical gap regarding the origins of Chinese "new music" and ethnic minority music education in China in the early 20th century.

### Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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