

The Music of the Lisu of Northern Thailand

By

HANS PETER LARSEN
University of Copenhagen, Institute of Musicology

THE LISU

The Lisu are one of several ethnic groups living in the hills of Northern Thailand, one of the so-called hill tribes. The Lisu number approximately 12,500 in Thailand,¹ but total several hundred thousand in all. The main part of the Lisu live along the northern part of the Yunnan-Burma border, and during the last 70 years there has been a steady migration of Lisu from Burma into Northern Thailand.

On a general level the distribution of the ethnic groups in Northern Thailand follows the various ecological zones at different altitudes in the hills. The Lisu live in the high hills together with the Hmong. Their villages are located close to the hill ridges (Fig. 1), and only comparatively few of the some eighty Lisu villages in Thailand can be reached by car.

The Lisu cultivate the slopes in the vicinity of the village using slash and burn techniques, and therefore their villages are not absolutely permanent, for they are moved when the soil has been impoverished. The only cash crop is opium, which is well adapted to the high altitude. As their main source of nutrition the Lisu grow dry mountain rice.²

Like the other hill tribes in Thailand, the Lisu are not Buddhists, holding instead their traditional beliefs in spirits and ancestors. Their spirit world forms a complicated structure. The village guardian spirit and the area spirit of the hill are served by the village priest, or *maw mong*, and each household worships the immediate ancestor spirits of the lineage. The Lisu also recognize a certain category of soul-calling spirits, which can be persuaded with offerings to bring back runaway souls to their owners.³ Offerings and incantations form an important



Fig. 1. Lisu village in the hills separating the Phrao and the Chiang Rai valleys.

part of the main Lisu festivals of the year, and a religious element is also present in the big wedding festivals, which reflect the great importance in Lisu social organization of marriage and the economic transactions involved with it. The Lisu men buy their brides for a substantial sum equalling several years of labour for the father-in-law, and Lisu social organization is based on a system of matrilineal rules (Dessaint 1972: 43–49; 140–150).

The Lisu are markedly different from the lowland Thai in most respects—language, economy, social organization and beliefs. They emphasize this difference and have only very limited social intercourse with the Thai. They also differ from the other hill tribes—the Hmong, Yao, Karen, Lahu, Akha and Lawa—although they share more common traits with these people, and they all live under similar ecological conditions.

The Lisu language is a Tibeto-Burman language of six tones and is linguistically related to the Lahu dialects and Akha, but the three languages are mutually unintelligible. Many traits in Lisu social organization and beliefs distinguish them from the surrounding tribes, and like most of the tribal peoples the Lisu, especially the women, still wear their characteristic colorful dress (Fig. 2).

To these identifying traits—**language**, dress, specific beliefs and social customs—we can add music. The way a person sings and plays betrays his Lisu identity as clearly as his language.



Fig. 2. Two young Lisu dressed up for the New Year festival.

THE MUSICAL TRADITIONS OF NORTHERN THAILAND

The conclusion that can be drawn from my preliminary field work⁴ and recordings from the hill tribes in Thailand is that each tribe has its own distinct vocal and instrumental styles. Musical influences between tribes having good social relationships (as for example the Lahu and the Lisu, or the Karen and the Lawa) is probable, but only in one single case was I able to demonstrate overlapping styles.⁵ Even the songs and vocal styles of the linguistically related Lahu, Akha and Lisu are very different. Further, musical influences between tribes which live in the same area but have only infrequent contacts and look at each other more or less contemptuously and with distrustfulness (as for example the Lisu and the Hmong) must be considered improbable.

Each tribe also has its own types of musical instruments. All tribes use bamboo flutes, but these differ in type and construction. Even in the few cases in which the same instrument is used by more than one tribe (for example the small mouth organ is used by the Lisu, the Lahu and the Akha) the musical styles are different.

Music is one of the important cultural traits that constitute tribal

identity and establish the tribe as a distinct ethnic group among others living in the same area. Changes of identity will occur during tribal intermarriages or when a tribe resettles in the lowlands, but on a general level tribal identity is rigidly maintained. Music making and musical behavior are an important part of this identity, but the steadily growing literature on the hill tribes has yet to focus upon it.

The music of the hill tribes generally is radically different from the music of the Thai. Thai vocal styles are not found in the hills, and the xylophones, metallophones, drums and oboes of the Thai *piiphâat*-ensembles are not found among the hill tribes, except among the Karen and Lawa people, who are settled in the foothills close to Thai communities. Lowland music, Thai or Western, that reaches the hill tribes daily via transistor radios, has as yet influenced the hill tribe music only a very little, and Lisu music is totally unaffected by lowland musical styles.

There exist two distinct categories in Lisu musical culture—instrumental music and songs. Only men play instruments, although both sexes may sing. Instruments and songs are never used in combination, and instrumental music is mainly used for dancing, which is not the case for the dominating song styles. In addition, instrumental and vocal Lisu music is extremely different in style.

LISU INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Its role in Lisu life. Among the Lisu there is only a slight division of labour except for between the sexes. Everybody fulfills the same basic tasks connected with work in the field and animal husbandry. Even the few specialists—the blacksmith, the shaman, the priest and the village headman—take part in the normal daily routines shared by all villagers. Likewise, the Lisu have no professional musicians.

All Lisu musicians are men.⁶ The young unmarried men are the most active, and in every village a few are recognized as being the most gifted. This reputation does not depend so much on technical skills, so long as the musician upholds the generally accepted standards. What is important is the size of his repertoire and his physical ability to go on playing for hours and days during festivals.

Instrumental music is used in two different ways: as dance music and without dancing, as a pastime in the evening when the working day is over.

The dancing takes place during wedding festivities and on a larger scale during the annual New Year festivals. The most important festival falls in the beginning of February. Its purpose is to provide the best possible transition for the Lisu into the new year. During the

festival several important offerings to the area spirit and to the village guardian spirit are made by the village priest, or *maw mong*, and the head of each household makes offerings to the ancestors at the spirit shelf inside his house. At the same time the New Year festival is the biggest social event of the year, an opportunity for everybody to have a good time, to drink and eat, to meet visiting relatives from other villages, to meet new girls, to court. Dancing and music form a central part of all this.

The dancing takes place around a spirit tree raised in the village. It starts on the last evening of the old year and continues for the following three, four, or five nights and part of the daytime too. All young people take part, as well as many married people and children. A few musicians take turns all through the night, each playing for approximately five minutes at a time. They get little or no sleep, for in the daytime many religious duties are performed, and there are large festival meals of the pork and chicken, which were earlier presented as offering gifts to the spirits.

Both dance and music have a religious function in themselves. The Lisu say that the sounds of instruments and laughter please the spirits and that the dancers stamping on the ground hold back bad spirits and prevent them from making the transition into the new year. But at the same time the New Year is the biggest get-together and entertainment of the year. The overall circle or mill-wing choreography of the dance emphasizes its function as an unifying collective social activity. Everybody uses the same steps, everybody can see each other, everybody holds hand, and everybody can participate. No special skills are required, and confusing the steps is met with laughter. There is normally only one musician at a time, and he dances in the middle of the circle close to the spirit tree. As the night goes on, the dance gets wilder, though never ecstatic, and by the early morning hours the dancers are nearly in a trance. They carry out their steps with deep concentration to the repeated sounds of the lute and mouth organ; many of them dance with their eyes closed.

I recorded the bulk of the repertoire of Lisu instrumental music from a single musician, who played the melodies while he danced around the suspended microphone. The close connection between the dance steps and their associated music was demonstrated several times during the recording sessions, when the musician declared that he was not able to play a certain tune without at the same time dancing the steps that belonged to it.

The instruments and their music. Six different types of instruments

are used by the Lisu: three types of mouth organs, a bamboo flute, a lute, and a wooden jews harp. The most common instruments are the small mouth organ, the lute and the flute. The two types of large mouth organs are only seldom heard today and are played mostly by older people. The jews harp was formerly considered a woman's instrument, but very few people play it nowadays. Each instrument has a musical repertoire of its own.

The lute *dsyböö* bears witness to the Lisu's contact with the Chinese in Yunnan and resembles the lute *san hsien* used in Chinese folk and art music. It has a little cylindrical sound box covered with lizard skin, a long neck, three metal strings and a moveable bridge, and it is plucked by a plectrum made from horn. Lisu musicians tune the three strings in four different ways (Ex. 1) and each of the four tunings has its own repertoire of melodies and melodic figures (Ex. 2a-b and Ex. 3).

Ex. 1: The four tunings of the *dsyböö* listed according to their frequency in the *dsyböö* repertoire.



Ex. 2a-b: Two *dsyböö* melodies using the first tuning of Ex. 1.



Ex. 3: *Dsyböö* melody using the second tuning of Ex. 1.



After the lute *dsyböö* the instrument most often heard among the Lisu is the small mouth organ *palk fölü* (Fig. 3). It has a wind chamber

made from a calabash and five bamboo pipes tuned to an anhemitonic pentatonic scale. Each pipe has one fingerhole and the second lowest pipe also has a tuning hole that shortens the pipe acoustically. On the part of each pipe that is inside the calabash there is a small wooden plate with a free-tongue reed (not a single reed such as is found in clarinets). This type of reed is only known in the mouth organs found in various forms among the tribal peoples of Southeast Asia and in more refined forms in the old court music of China, Korea and Japan. The reed vibrates only when the pipe's fingerhole is closed, and a tone is produced when the musician either inhales or exhales—he breathes



Fig. 3. The small Lisu mouth organ *pali fólú*.

through the instrument, so to speak. It is possible to play all five tones of the *pali fólú* at the same time, and *pali fólú* music is basically a simple drone polyphony, as can be seen from Ex. 4. The deep pipe sounds throughout the whole tune, and the melody part is played on the other four pipes. Occasionally a tone is sustained, and chords of three or more tones result. Once or twice in all *pali fólú* melodies, however, the drone is abandoned for a moment for a progression in parallel fifths, which is part of a fixed cadence pattern in the music. The ornaments in *pali fólú* music, which are sketched in Ex. 4, are produced by touching the open ends of the pipes, which protrude underneath the calabash, with the thumb of the right hand.

Ex. 4: *Pali fólú* melody.

The two types of large Lisu mouth organs, the *fólú 'o'óo* and the *fólú láláa*, appear very similar at first sight, but they differ in tuning and in details of construction (Fig. 4). The *fólú 'o'óo* is tuned to a



Fig. 4. The large Lisu mouth organ *fólú 'o'óo*.

four tone scale with octave doubling of one tone. Only two of the pipes protrude underneath the calabash, and one is filled with wax, which leaves only one end open. This open end is used for a rhythmic ornamentation in the music. Also the *fólú 'o'óo* style is a simple drone polyphony, and the drone tone is abandoned only for a few moments (Ex. 5).

Ex. 5: *Fólú 'o'óo* melody.

In contrast with the two other Lisu mouth organ types the *fólú láláa* is tuned to a hemitonic pentatonic scale which is not often found in the music of South East Asia. The lowest pipe of the instrument has no fingerhole and therefore sounds throughout the whole melody. The tone D notated in Ex. 6 is produced by closing both the fingerhole and the open end of pipe no. 3.

Ex. 6: *Fólú láláa* melody.



Though the two large mouth organs are seldom used now, the Lisu flute *djylêé* (Fig. 5) is popular, but more as an instrument for



Fig. 5. The Lisu bamboo flute *djylêé*.

pasttime entertainment than for dancing. The style of playing is the same for both. The *djylêé* is a whistle flute and has six fingerholes. Its music is highly ornamented and uses a pentatonic scale with one

passing tone and a range of up to one octave plus a fifth (Ex. 7).

Ex. 7. Djylêe melody.



All Lisu dance melodies are played over and over again with only minor alterations that do not affect the overall melody or formal structure of the melodies. Similarly the same combination of dance steps is repeated. Each tune corresponds to one specific series of dance steps. The general rule is one melody to one dance, but a few melodies are used for more than one series of steps and vice versa.

All Lisu dance music is dominated by a regular beat, which can adequately be transcribed in 4/4 time. One measure in the transcriptions corresponds to two steps in the dance. On the strong first beat the left foot is put to the ground; on the weaker second beat there is a slight flexing of the left knee; on the strong third beat the right foot is put to the ground; on the weaker fourth beat there is a slight flexing of the right knee, and so on. All dances are composed of various combinations of steps performed in this manner in different directions— forwards, backwards, and diagonally backwards—within the overall direction of movement, which is counter-clockwise around the spirit tree.

The seven transcriptions of dance melodies (Ex. 2-7) cannot adequately represent the total of 125 different Lisu dance melodies recorded. But the repertoires of the single instruments (and tunings of the *dsyböö*) show a high degree of uniformity, and the tunes given show the characteristic features of both the various categories of Lisu instrumental music and of the instrumental music as a whole. First they show the Lisu dance music as basically pentatonic. A hemitonic pentatonic scale is found in the *fólú láláa* music, while the other instrumental repertoires use various modes of anhemitonic pentatonic scales. Falling melodic curves are found in Ex. 2b, 3 and 7, in certain sections of the melodies, as well as in the overall melodic profile. The highest pitches of the scale are used at the beginning of the tunes, and the lowest pitches come at the end in the cadence patterns. This is true for most djylêe and *dsyböö* music, and falling melodic curves also dominate Lisu song formulas.

The melodic building blocks of Lisu instrumental music are a number of small melodic figures. These are specific to each instrument

and constitute the stylistic uniformity within each of the instrumental repertoires. The figures are linked together in a variety of different combinations similar to the way the various sequences of dance steps are combined. The number of melodic figures is larger than the number of step sequences, however, and the figures are specific to the different instrumental repertoires, while the same step sequences are used for all instrumental music. The melodic figures are organized into what analytically can be described as segments from one to three measures in length. One melodic figure can fill a whole segment, or the segment can consist of a combination of two or three small melodic figures. Segments of two measures (corresponding to four dance steps) are the most common, but occasionally also segments of one or three measures are used as seen in the transcriptions of examples 2a and 7 (2+2+2+2); Ex. 3 (2+2+2+2+2); Ex. 2b (2+2+2+3); Ex. 5 (2+2+1+2); Ex. 4 (2+2+1+1+1+2+1+2+1). and Ex. 6 (2+2+2+1+3). Many Lisu dance tunes have a regular segmental structure of 4, 6, 8 or 10 times two measures (as in Ex. 2a, 3 and 7), but as often this regularity is broken by segments of one or three measures (as in Ex. 2b, 4, 5, 6), and often the result is melodies of an uneven number of measures (as in Ex. 2b, 4 and 5). The entire corpus of dance melodies varies in length between 7 and 22 measures.

The additive way by which the melodic figures and segments are put together in the Lisu dance melodies produces open melodic structures. Closed symmetrical forms are very seldom found. The small number of melodic figures in each instrumental repertoire are freely combined in the individual melodies. It is not a unique melodic profile that constitutes the identity of each Lisu dance melody, for many tunes are very much alike, due to the common material of the melodic figures in each repertoire. The identity of melodies—which is clearly acknowledged by the musicians—is created rather by the specific combination of common melodic figures within a specific segmental structure that corresponds closely to the dance steps belonging to the melody.

LISU SONGS

Their role in Lisu life. Although only men play instruments, both men and women sing. Only four song formulas are commonly used by the Lisu⁷ (see Ex. 8), one preferably by the young unmarried people, two by the elders mostly during marriage and New Year festivals, and the last exclusively for soul-calling ceremonies.

The most active singers are the young unmarried people. Nearly every night one can hear them singing as they sit on the rocks at the outskirts of the village or in the rest houses along the path leading to the

village. They prefer places some distance from the adults, where they can have a good time singing together for hours, talking and making contact in the dark. Often several young men and women alternate within the same song, and an experienced male singer usually whispers the new text to the lead singer of the group before each stanza. The young men try to get the girls they are interested in to sing with them, and these songs form an important part of Lisu courting. Many things can be said in them which would not be allowed in spoken language. The song texts are improvised, but the young singers draw from a stock of known and accepted textual motifs: love, longing and jealousy, or the pain of separation; they also praise their parents and stress the importance of tradition. The young people's song texts as a whole affirm the basic values and rules in Lisu society and thus the songs play an important part in the socializing of the young. Although the texts abound in strong and poetic love expressions, they are not personal love songs. The motifs and poetic pictures of the texts are well known and thus are rather predictable to the beloved one as well as to the listeners gathered around the singers. The courting lies as much in the very song situation—getting the beloved one to sing along—as it lies in the words themselves.

The following translation⁸ is an extract from a courting song of an apparently very personal character. However, the motifs and poetic pictures of this text are common in other Lisu courting songs and the young man whispers the girl's words to her before each of her stanzas. Nor was the song situation very intimate, as at least twenty young people were gathered around the two singers in a deserted house at the rim of the village. Again, the very situation of singing with the beloved one and demonstrating one's excellent ability to use the traditional melodic and textual formulas seems to be the actual expression of love more than what is literally said and promised in the words.

Boy: Oh dear! Consider very carefully. Will you ask for my protection? Think again and again. Will you give your heart to me?

Girl: My dear! I have thought enough. Thinking this much is enough.

Boy: My dear! Do not look only at my clothes. Do not look only at my ordinary daily life.

Girl: Whatever you say, I will still love you. I will still love you.

Boy: My dear! You are so kind. You have already plucked my heart. My heart is my own, but it is yours too.

Girl: I will not give my heart to other men, either at the front house of the village or at the end house of the village.

- Boy:* What did you say? You said "I will not give my heart to other men." Just that promise you cannot keep.
- Girl:* No matter how good the others may be, I will not be interested in them.
- Boy:* I am afraid that you will be like a beautiful flower, which the insects like to fly around all the time.
- Girl:* I will not at all be like the flower which you said the insects like to fly around.
- Boy:* Look over there. A lot of white turbans all over. Also a lot of small shoulder bags have already come.⁹
- Girl:* Whether they are white or yellow, I will not be interested.
- Boy:* Oh girl from the *Mii* family, you certainly have to think it over very carefully.
- Girl:* I have already thought three times, already thought three times.
- Boy:* My dear! Please remember that flowers have their sweet scent only once. Flowers will not bloom twice.
- Girl:* I have never thought that flowers have their sweet scent twice. I have never thought that flowers will bloom twice.
- Boy:* Father brought me up to be a wandering man. Mother brought me up to be a wandering man.
- Girl:* I will not worry about that. I still have the same stable heart.
- Boy:* I am like a bird in a new place. I am only a stranger who has passed seven towns.
- Boy:* I traveled through seven villages to come to you. I traveled through nine towns to come to you.
- Girl:* Even if you have been through seven women, even if you have passed nine women, I will still love you.
- Boy:* If that is so, your father is my father, your mother is my mother.
- Girl:* No matter what you think, I do hope to ask for your protection. Think thoroughly. I only hope to ask for your protection.

Young people's courting songs often go through all of the long and complicated marriage negotiations, and the marriage ceremony itself is related, often with strong and imaginative poetic pictures and transitions from realism to traditional fantasy. The rules of good conduct for men and women in the marriage process and the importance of adherence to tradition is stressed, and in this way the young people's courting songs function as practice for the much longer real marriage songs sung by the elders.

After the wedding ceremony is over and the wedding meal has been eaten in the house of the bride's parents, the wedding song is sung throughout the night. A song formula different from the young people's courting formula is used, but the elderly singer sings the roles of both the young man and woman throughout the long process from

the first courtship until the bride is instructed in her household duties by the young man. The song deals with the complicated negotiations carried out by go-betweens, and the payment of the bride prize to her parents and relatives, who all put forward unrealistic claims; it describes both the girl's happiness and the grief she feels at the same time because she has to leave her parents. In short the song outlines in poetic form the fundamental Lisu rules of good behavior connected with courtship and marriage and the respect which should be paid to the in-laws.



Fig. 6. Two Lisu women singing.

The two song formulas used primarily by the elders during marriage and New Year festivals may also be heard on other occasions. The texts will then often have an admonishing character stressing the importance of tradition, the necessity of respect for parents and good rules of conduct toward family and fellow tribesmen. The following translation is an extract of a song sung by two middle-aged women (photo 6). A group of young people and children gathered around them, and the song is representative of these songs in general, and of Lisu self-understanding.

Today everybody has come together. I feel very happy.
Oh, brothers and sisters! Though you do not want to listen, please
be quiet and listen to what I am going to say.
Even if something is as small as your little finger, you must think very
carefully. Everything is fundamental.
Whatever one does, one must think three times back and forth before
doing it.
Whatever you do, you have to try your best, my young children.
When you have tried your best, we are satisfied, even if you do not
succeed.
Everybody who listens to this song, please keep it and reflect upon it.
I do not intend to teach, but the song goes like this.
Oh, young children! The sky is still over the top of the mountain.
The valley is still deep down by the stream.
Oh, young children! Even if you are rich, do not forget to behave
yourselves.
Oh, young children! Look at the people in the towns. We have to
compete with them.
They who stay in towns are happy. People who have paddy-fields to
cultivate should be happy.
Oh, young children! People who have fields to plant, they should love
the rice in the fields, too.
Oh, young children! Rich people always are rich people. Whatever
they do, they still are rich people.
People talk a great deal about the big towns, so everybody remembers
them very easily. The small group of hill tribe people is always
forgotten.
Oh, young children! There is only one happy day in a year: That
is New Year's Day.
Oh, young children! Play instruments and enjoy yourselves together
with all your heart.
Young children! Listen to your parents' teaching.
If we are strong and unafraid of obstacles, we will always provide security
for our relatives.
To have an older brother to assist in talk, to have a younger brother
to assist in work is support and help for your friends and relatives.
The happiness and satisfaction of our friends is our happiness.
When our relatives and friends feel satisfied, we also feel happy.
It is a good thing not to gossip about friends and relatives.
It is the best happiness in life to see that our brothers and sisters are
happy.
If there is something wrong in what I have said, I hope that you will
forgive me. All you people are not just anybody, you are my relatives.
You have listened to my advice. Do not get angry. It was all good
wishes.

The last of the four common Lisu song formulas (see Ex. 8) is used by the elders in soul-calling ceremonies, which are addressed to the soul-calling spirits when somebody in the household is ill or weak. The Lisu say that women have seven souls and men nine, and the absence of one or more souls can cause sickness. By way of sung invocations and offerings the soul-calling spirits are persuaded to go out and look for the runaway soul.

The only person in the village who has his own songs is the *ni phà*, or the shaman. His expertise is required when people get sick or need to have their fortune told before important decisions. In curing ceremonies¹⁰ the *ni phà* becomes possessed by his lineage and helping spirits, and at the instant he is possessed he begins to whistle a special spirit tune. He is now the medium between the people and the spirit world, and he is able to answer questions from the relatives of the sick person about diagnosis and advisable curing methods. He does this in the form of song, using two special spirit song formulas which are not like anything else sung by the Lisu.¹¹ He stamps his bare feet in the embers of the fire and eats the burning ends of magic joss sticks, and he then touches the sick person with his foot and exhales "burning air" and spits spirit water from the spirit shelf onto the afflicted part of the patient's body. He only sings while he is possessed—the song and whistling are the very sounds of the spirits.

Of all the Lisu song formulas only those of the shaman are used exclusively by one person. The soul-calling formula can be used by all heads of households, and the courting formula and the festive formulas are only preferably used by the young and the elders respectively. There is no set rule against a young person trying his way through one of the festival formulas, and occasionally married people use the courting formula.

The musical structure of Lisu songs. Except for the shaman's songs and dance songs (see notes 7 and 11), all Lisu songs follow one of four standard formulas. No change of formula ever occurs in the course of a song. But it must be stressed that the formulas are not fixed melodies—no two singers sing them exactly the same way. They exist in the singers' minds as basic melodic structures—intervals and relative tone durations that must be utilized in the melodic flow of each stanza. Within these rather narrow limits each singer uses the formula as he likes. An analytical comparison of the same formulas used by a number of singers will yield the common denominators shown in Ex. 8.

The formulas are divided by rests into sections. Each section

is sung in one breath and most sections start in the upper or middle part of the melodic range of the formula and end, when the singer has used up the rest of his air, at the deepest tones of the scale used in the formula. The interval of a perfect fourth formed by the long

Ex. 8. Basic structure of Lisu song formulas. a: courting formula; b and c: festival and admonition; formulas d: soul-calling formula.

The image displays four examples of Lisu song formulas, labeled 'a' through 'd'. Each example consists of two staves of musical notation.
 - Example 'a' shows a courting formula with two sections: 'A' (top staff) and 'B' (bottom staff).
 - Example 'b' shows festival and admonition formulas with three sections: 'A' (top staff), 'B' (bottom staff), and 'C' (further down the bottom staff).
 - Example 'c' shows soul-calling formulas with five sections: 'A' (top staff), 'B' (bottom staff), 'C' (further down), 'D' (bottom staff), and 'E' (further down).
 - Example 'd' shows another soul-calling formula with two sections: 'A' (top staff) and 'B' (bottom staff).
 The notation includes treble clefs, various note values (quarter, eighth, sixteenth notes), rests, and accidentals (sharps, naturals).

sustained tones is of great structural importance in all formulas, and in contrast to the pentatonic instrumental music, scales of six or seven tones are used when the formulas are sung. Any given formula can be varied according to the number of words that go with the different stanzas. Most of the text is delivered in the A section of the formulas, and that is where greatest variations between single stanzas and between singers are found.

The formulas are sung in free rhythm, but are regulated by a slow unstable organic pulse, which also varies from singer to singer. This absence of a dominating strict meter sets the songs in sharp contrast to Lisu dance music. The adherence to fixed tone patterns, furthermore, is of a very different nature in instrumental music and in songs. Instrumental melodies are formed by a free and variable combination of

Ex. 9: Courting song, six stanzas.

$\text{♩} \approx 72$

Boy:

hei muama so ha lei - a a a -

mu a so ei dai

ha - niwai - i a do mu a shi o i djea

Girl:

hi ku ku o ai thi di e ei i dy za -

a za ha - a lo

ha - thi li e i ku so - za ni e - wo -

Boy:

hei muama la gi mu na - za za i en - kua -

tha ni e - ja joi

ha - za za - ji sa da - thom om na -

Girl:

hei ku ku o wa a li a i do ko -

a bi mai ja joi

ha - a bi e i di sa - sa ma - sha -

Girl:

ha bi mo - sa ka - i kua li a -

ni kua li - ja shoi

ha - lo pha - i be li a - sa na - dia -

Boy:

hei muama so o ji no da - sa ni a o - i sa ka o -

kua li - ja lai

ha - la so - i la pha - mu a dia - ma -

a number of short melodic figures, while the songs use only one of four long standard formulas, which can be varied within well-defined limits. An impression of how the formulas actually sound when not analytically reduced to their basic structure can be gained from the transcriptions in Ex. 9 and 10. Ex. 9 gives six stanzas of the courting song which was given in partial translation above. Ex. 10 gives four stanzas of a song using formula b of Ex. 8; it was also presented in translation above.

Ex. 10. Admonition song, four stanzas. The symbol “*” marks the entry of second singer.

$d=52$
 ɣɿ ɳɿ wa - ni mje a tho ɿɿ sha ja a bo ɿ
 ni ve i sha a wa hia nie ɿɿ wa
 ɿɿ wa ɿɿ mje - a sa le do za - kha
 sha i do a kha wa ko ka na wa
 ɿɿ wa ha do - a sa lo ki man - do
 a ma i po - so do na na na ja
 ɿɿ wa pha lo a sa pha di za - a na ka da
 tho - - i so sa do ku su na kha -

CONCLUSION

It should again be stressed that musically the Lisu express themselves in two sharply contrasting media—the exclusively male instrumental music, which has a strict meter, and the long formula songs in free rhythm sung by both sexes. The two repertoires are never directly combined, but on the other hand they are sometimes used side by side at the same occasions. When the young people sing courting songs, somebody will often pluck his lute or blow his flute or mouth organ not far away, and during marriage and New Year celebrations festival

songs can be heard from the houses while the dancing goes on around the spirit tree close by. Singers and musicians do not seem disturbed by each other's music.

Lisu songs and instrumental music do share some common functional traits. The soul-calling songs and the shaman's songs clearly fulfill magical functions, but the cultic element is also obvious in the New Year dancing and music making. The Lisu explicitly say that "the spirits like the sweet and beautiful sound of the mouth organ" and that the stamping feet of the dancers keep bad spirits in the old abandoned year and out of the new year. Both Lisu musical categories also clearly function to unite collective activities: the young people in the dark gathered around the singers; the whole village dancing around the spirit tree. In these situations music and dance traditions are passed from the more experienced to the younger and inexperienced without any formal teacher-pupil relationships. Sharing the same music—the Lisu's own and only music—stimulates a sense of belonging, of Lisu identity. And explicitly many song texts stress the values and rules of Lisu society and thus take an active part in the formation of Lisu personality. By hearing a Lisu play or sing you know he is a Lisu. His music, like his language, is part of his Lisu identity and cannot be mistaken for the music of any other hill tribe.

The musical landscape of Northern Thailand is varied and fascinating, and the many ethnic groups living close together provide a rich field for research into the role of music in the process of cultural interaction. There is little risk that Lisu music or any other single tribal music will disappear by way of inter-tribal acculturation. What can be feared is that the tribal cultures as a whole will disintegrate under the pressure of the heavy economic, social and political problems that haunt the area. When hill tribe families or villages give up living in the hills and settle in the lowlands they normally are assimilated in less than one generation and change their dress, language and music. To date the Lisu and most other hill tribes have shown a strong disinclination against settling among the Thai. But as population in the hills increases, the hill tribes will have to adjust their traditional production methods, and in the long run the survival of the Lisu and other tribal cultures depends on the solving of the demographic and social problems of Northern Thailand, in which opium production and traffic play a very serious part.

NOTES

1. They make up only 3.8% of the hill tribe population in Thailand according

to a recent estimate by Peter Kunstadter (1983).

2. For a thorough description of Lisu economy and agriculture see Alain Yvon Dessaint 1972.

3. A detailed analysis of the Lisu spirit world and its importance for the understanding of Lisu curing practices is found in Durrenberger 1971.

4. The field work that forms the basis of this paper was carried out in Northern Thailand from January to September 1973, thanks to a grant from the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies. The field study concentrated on the musical culture of the Lisu, but I also did field work among the Northern Thai, the Hmong, the Lahu Nyk, the Lahu Nyi, the Pwo Karen, the Akha and the Lawa. The results, some one hundred hours of recorded material, are accessible at the Danish Folklore Archives, Copenhagen. The material has been analyzed and presented in Larsen 1981.

5. The Lisu probably borrowed one of their big mouth organ types and the style that goes with it from the Lahu Nyi. The instrument is tuned to a hemitonic pentatonic scale otherwise not used by the Lisu, but also represented in some vocal styles of the Lahu Nyi.

6. The same is the case with several other hill tribes, but it is not a rule without exception in the highlands. Among the Lahu Nyi women are active musicians playing the lute (Thai-Burmese type), the notched flute, and the small mouth organ. This corresponds to a higher degree of equality between the sexes in Lahu society.

7. There exists, however, a repertoire of dance songs, but these songs are seldom heard. Only when there is no acceptable musician on hand do people sing for dancing. Most of these songs are clearly sung versions of instrumental melodies, but some of them might be original independent dance songs, since they are now found in idiomatically different instrumental versions.

8. The Lisu song texts were translated into Thai directly from the tapes by Mr. Boontan Khamkhio, one of the few Lisu who reads and writes Thai fluently. Later the Thai texts were translated into English. Errors and inaccuracies may have resulted from this process, but even if the translations are not accurate from a linguist's point of view, they give a good feeling for the contents of the texts. My fifteen hours of recorded Lisu song are accessible at the Danish Folklore Archives for any linguist who might take an interest in them. Attention is drawn to the fact that Lisu is a tonal language, and therefore it would be very interesting to study how the tones in the Lisu language are used or transformed when the language is sung on rather fixed melodic formulas.

9. "White turbans" and "small shoulder bags" are metaphores for "young men."

10. I witnessed several curing ceremonies, but unfortunately was never allowed to bring in my tape recorder.

11. The shaman's formulas are in a sort of 3/4 and 3/8 time very unlike the free rhythmic song formulas or the strict 4/4 time of the dance music.

REFERENCES CITED

DESSAINT, Alain Yvon

1972 *Economic organization of the Lisu of the Thai highlands*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Hawaii: Honolulu.

DURRENBERGER, Edward Paul

1971 *The ethnography of Lisu curing*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University

of Michigan: Ann Arbor.

KUNSTADTER, Peter

1983 Highland populations in northern Thailand. In Wanat Bhruksasri and John McKinnon, eds., *Highlanders of Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LARSEN, Hans Peter

1981 *Lisuernes Musik*. M.A. thesis, University of Copenhagen.