



## Cultural Harmonies: Exploring Compositional Techniques and Cultural Fusion in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music

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**Abstract:** This study investigates compositional techniques within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, focusing on the transformative influence of cultural fusion. Through interviews with local musicians from the Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui ethnic groups, the research identifies recurring elements and variations in musical practices. Cultural fusion emerges as a dynamic force shaping compositional creativity, where deliberate blending of traditional instruments, melodic motifs, and rhythmic patterns transcends individual ethnic styles. The impact on the listener's perception reveals enhanced accessibility and relatability, attracting a diverse audience. The dual role of cultural fusion is evident—preserving cultural identity while catalyzing musical evolution. As musicians adapt tradition to contemporary contexts, Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music becomes a bridge between heritage and innovation. The study contributes to broader discussions on global music by highlighting the power of cultural fusion in fostering cross-cultural understanding. Guizhou's musicians emerge as cultural ambassadors, shaping a narrative that transcends geographic boundaries, inviting scholars and enthusiasts to explore the intricate interplay of tradition, innovation, and cultural exchange in the musical realm.

**Keywords:** Cultural Fusion, Compositional Techniques, Ethnic Music, Guizhou, Cultural Identity

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### I. Introduction.

#### A. Background

Ethnic music encompasses a rich tapestry of sonic expressions deeply rooted in the cultural and traditional practices of specific communities<sup>[1]</sup>. Unlike mainstream or popular music, which often reflects broader and more global influences, ethnic music is intimately tied to the identity, history, and heritage of particular ethnic groups. It is characterized by a unique blend of indigenous instruments, vocal styles, rhythmic patterns, and melodic structures that distinguish it from other musical genres.

The diversity within ethnic music is vast, ranging from the rhythmic complexities of African drumming traditions to the intricate ornamentations of Middle Eastern maqamat, and from the pentatonic scales of East Asian traditions to the microtonal nuances of Indian classical music. Understanding ethnic music requires an exploration of its cultural, social, and historical contexts, as each composition serves as a vessel for the preservation and transmission of cultural narratives<sup>[2]</sup>.

The concept of cultural fusion in musical composition refers to the deliberate incorporation and blending of diverse cultural elements, styles, and traditions within a musical work<sup>[3]</sup>. In the context of ethnic music, cultural fusion becomes a dynamic and transformative force that shapes the artistic process. It involves the juxtaposition and integration of musical elements from different cultural backgrounds, contributing to the creation of hybridized and innovative forms of expression. The musical traditions within China's Guizhou's ethnic minority communities are deeply intertwined with daily life, religious ceremonies, agricultural practices, and social gatherings. Each ethnic group contributes its own set of musical styles and forms, contributing to the rich mosaic of Guizhou's cultural identity. Understanding the nuances of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music involves delving into the specific scales, melodic structures, and performance contexts unique to each community, offering a microcosm of China's diverse musical landscape.

Cultural fusion in Guizhou's ethnic music is not merely a stylistic choice but a testament to the region's history of intercultural exchange and coexistence. It represents a dynamic dialogue between the preservation of cultural heritage and the exploration of new artistic horizons. As Guizhou continues to undergo social and economic transformations, the study of compositional techniques in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music becomes increasingly crucial for unraveling the complex interplay between cultural tradition and contemporary creativity. This paper aims to explore the intricacies of cultural fusion within the compositional practices of Guizhou's ethnic minority musicians, shedding light on the innovative approaches employed in the creation of their musical masterpieces.

#### B. Purpose of the Study



The purpose of this study is to delve into the compositional techniques employed within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, placing a specific emphasis on the phenomenon of cultural fusion. In exploring the intentional integration of diverse cultural elements by musicians and composers in Guizhou, the study seeks to achieve multiple objectives. Firstly, it aims to uncover the dynamic interplay of cultural elements from various ethnic communities within the region, shedding light on instances of deliberate cultural fusion and the reinterpretation of traditional elements in musical compositions. Secondly, the study endeavors to analyze the impact of cultural fusion on the overall structure, harmonic progressions, melodic motifs, and rhythmic patterns within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. Thirdly, it seeks to evaluate how cultural fusion contributes to the construction and preservation of cultural identity, assessing whether intentional blending enhances or transforms the authenticity of the music and influences perceptions of cultural identity among musicians and audiences. Lastly, the study aims to understand the broader socio-cultural implications of cultural fusion in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, examining its role in fostering cross-cultural understanding, facilitating inter-community dialogue, and reflecting the social dynamics within the region.

### C. Research Questions

To address the outlined purpose of the study, the following research questions will guide the investigation:

- How do composers and musicians within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music intentionally incorporate elements from different ethnic traditions into their compositions?
- What compositional techniques emerge as a result of cultural fusion, and how do they manifest in terms of musical form, structure, and expressive elements within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music?
- In what ways does cultural fusion contribute to the construction and preservation of cultural identity in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music?

## II. Literature Review

### 1. Traditional Foundations of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music

Historically, Guizhou has been home to various ethnic groups, including the Miao, Dong, Yi, Shui, and others, each contributing distinctive musical traditions to the region's cultural mosaic. Studies such as Nettl's <sup>[4]</sup>seminal work on ethnomusicology provide a foundational understanding of the traditional elements found in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. Traditional instruments, vocal styles, and ritualistic practices have been integral components, forming the basis upon which contemporary composers build.

### 2. Cultural Fusion in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music

The notion of cultural fusion within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music is a complex interplay of tradition and innovation. As explored by Stokes <sup>[5]</sup> in the context of ethnicity and music, the intentional blending of diverse cultural elements becomes a dynamic force shaping the evolution of musical compositions. Within Guizhou's ethnic minority communities, this fusion is not a recent phenomenon; it is deeply rooted in historical exchanges and interactions among different ethnic groups (Bentley, 1993)<sup>[6]</sup>.

### 3. Ethnomusicological Perspectives on Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music

Ethnomusicological studies provide a lens through which to understand Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music within its broader cultural context. Works by scholars like Merriam <sup>[7]</sup>and Tilton <sup>[8]</sup>emphasize the importance of contextualizing music within the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of the communities that produce it. Such perspectives are essential for unraveling the layers of meaning embedded in the compositional techniques of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music.

### 4. Intercultural Dialogues and Cross-Cultural Influences

Guizhou's history of intercultural dialogues and exchanges has significantly influenced the region's musical landscape. Appadurai's <sup>[9]</sup> exploration of cultural globalization provides a framework for understanding how external influences seep into local musical practices. In the context of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, these influences may manifest through the introduction of new instruments, stylistic elements, or collaborative efforts between artists from different ethnic backgrounds.

### 5. Contemporary Approaches to Compositional Techniques

As Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music adapts to contemporary contexts, composers navigate the delicate balance between preserving tradition and embracing innovation. Gardner's <sup>[10]</sup> theory of multiple intelligences provides a lens for understanding how musicians within Guizhou draw upon diverse forms of intelligence to create compositions that resonate with both authenticity and relevance in the modern era.

### 6. Socio-Cultural Implications of Cultural Fusion

The socio-cultural implications of cultural fusion in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music are multifaceted. Beyond the realm of music, this fusion contributes to broader conversations about identity, community relations, and cross-cultural understanding. Works such as Turner's <sup>[11]</sup> exploration of symbolic action in human society offer insights into the symbolic meanings embedded in the musical expressions of Guizhou's ethnic minorities.

## III. Theoretical Framework

### A. Cultural Syncretism Theory

Cultural Syncretism Theory, as applied to the realm of music composition, provides a theoretical lens through which the dynamic process of blending diverse cultural elements can be understood. Syncretism, derived from the Greek word

"synkretismos" meaning union or alliance, refers to the amalgamation of different cultural and musical traditions. In the context of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, Cultural Syncretism Theory becomes a pivotal concept for unpacking the ways in which various ethnic musical traditions merge, interact, and coalesce to form new, hybridized expressions.

This theory, applied to music composition, provides a theoretical lens that aptly captures the amalgamation of diverse cultural elements within the musical expressions of Guizhou's ethnic minority communities. The theory's emphasis on hybridization, adaptation, and cultural exchange resonates with the intentional integration of traditional elements from various ethnic groups in Guizhou. The process of blending different cultural and musical traditions, as outlined in Cultural Syncretism Theory, aligns with the study's focus on exploring intentional cultural fusion and the creation of hybridized musical forms. Moreover, the theory's recognition of adaptation as a fundamental aspect corresponds to the study's goal of analyzing the impact of cultural fusion on the overall structure, harmonic progressions, melodic motifs, and rhythmic patterns within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. Therefore, the Cultural Syncretism Theory provides a relevant and comprehensive framework for understanding how diverse cultural elements merge to shape the unique compositional techniques observed in Guizhou's ethnic music landscape.

## 2. Application to Ethnic Music Composition

The application of Cultural Syncretism Theory manifests distinctly through the deliberate integration of traditional elements from diverse ethnic minority groups. Composers engage in a nuanced process of curation, adaptation, and fusion of musical materials, resulting in compositions that harmoniously blend historical authenticity with contemporary relevance. This application is perceptible across various facets of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music compositions. Instrumentation, for instance, becomes a canvas for cultural syncretism as traditional instruments from different ethnic groups, such as lusheng, suona, and lusheng, are intentionally brought together, creating a rich tapestry of timbres and textures that symbolize the fusion of diverse cultural identities. Moreover, the theory extends to the manipulation of melodic and rhythmic patterns within compositions, where composers draw from the melodic idioms and rhythmic structures of various ethnic traditions, weaving them together to form cohesive and innovative musical narratives. The influence of Cultural Syncretism is also evident in the lyrics and thematic content of the music, as compositions explore common themes that resonate across different ethnic cultures, fostering a sense of shared experience and identity while carefully preserving the distinct cultural nuances of each

## IV. Methodology

The methodology for this study on compositional techniques in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music involves a combination of qualitative approaches, focusing on interviews with local musicians from diverse ethnic groups—Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui. The aim is to gain insights into their creative processes, cultural perspectives, and the intentional use of cultural fusion in their musical compositions. The qualitative approach is chosen for this study due to its suitability for conducting in-depth explorations of the complex phenomena of cultural fusion within the context of ethnic music. The study's objectives, which include uncovering dynamic interplays of cultural elements, analyzing the impact of cultural fusion on musical elements, and understanding socio-cultural implications, align well with the flexibility and contextual understanding offered by qualitative research. Cultural sensitivity is paramount in this diverse setting, and the qualitative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of musicians' perspectives and experiences. It enables a holistic examination of compositional techniques, considering both traditional foundations and contemporary applications, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between cultural tradition and creative innovation.

### A. Selection of Participants

The inclusion criteria prioritize musicians from diverse ethnic backgrounds, specifically the Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui communities, encompassing a broad spectrum of ages and experiences. This selection seeks to capture a range of perspectives, encompassing both traditional musicians dedicated to preserving historical forms and contemporary artists actively engaged in innovative compositions. The diversity extends to the specialization of participants, including composers, instrumentalists, and vocalists, reflecting the multifaceted nature of Guizhou's ethnic music landscape.

### B. Informed Consent and Cultural Sensitivity

Prior to engaging in interviews with local musicians representing the Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui ethnic groups, a clear and transparent informed consent procedure will be followed. Participants will be provided with comprehensive information about the research objectives, methods, and potential outcomes, enabling them to make informed decisions about their involvement. Recognizing the cultural diversity within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, particular attention will be given to cultural sensitivity. The researcher will approach the interviews with a deep understanding of the unique cultural nuances and traditions of each ethnic group, ensuring that the conversations respect local protocols, privacy considerations, and any potential sensitivities related to sacred or ceremonial aspects of their musical practices.

### C. Interview Structure

The structure of the interviews for this study is designed to be semi-structured, allowing for flexibility and depth in exploring the perspectives of local musicians from the Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui ethnic groups regarding compositional techniques in Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. Through a series of open-ended questions, the semi-structured format aims to elicit in-depth responses that capture the nuances of their creative processes and experiences with cultural fusion. To facilitate a richer understanding, participants will be encouraged to provide musical demonstrations, offering tangible examples of specific compositional techniques, melodic patterns, or rhythmic structures they employ in their music.

## D. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study adopts a qualitative approach, employing thematic coding to uncover recurring themes and patterns across the interviews with local musicians from the Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui ethnic groups. Through a comprehensive analysis of the transcribed interviews, this study aims to identify commonalities and differences in the musicians' perspectives on compositional techniques and the intentional use of cultural fusion within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. The qualitative analysis will extend to a comparative examination, exploring how musicians from various ethnic backgrounds perceive and integrate cultural fusion in their compositions. By utilizing member checking and validation, the findings will be refined through participant feedback, enhancing the credibility and accuracy of the qualitative data interpretation.

## V. Findings

### A. Patterns in Compositional Techniques

#### 1. Identifying Recurring Elements Across Case Studies

The analysis of interviews with local musicians from diverse ethnic groups in Guizhou—Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui—reveals intriguing patterns in compositional techniques that transcend specific ethnic boundaries. Commonalities emerge in the use of traditional instruments such as lusheng, suona, and lusheng, showcasing the musicians' commitment to preserving historical forms. Melodic patterns, characterized by distinctive scales and modalities, also recur, forming the foundation of compositions that draw on the cultural heritage of each ethnic group. Additionally, rhythmic structures, often rooted in ceremonial and ritualistic practices, contribute to the dynamic and expressive qualities of the music.

#### 2. Variations in Approach Based on Cultural Context

While identifying recurring elements provides a foundation for understanding compositional techniques, the variations in approach based on cultural context highlight the nuanced and diverse expressions within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. Differences in instrumentation become apparent, with certain ethnic groups favoring specific traditional instruments or incorporating unique variations of common instruments. The melodic and harmonic nuances exhibit variations influenced by regional folklore, historical narratives, and ceremonial significance. Rhythmic intricacies also vary, reflecting the distinctive dance forms and social rituals embedded in each ethnic community's cultural identity.

### B. Cultural Fusion as a Creative Force

#### 1. Demonstrating How Cultural Fusion Enhances Compositional Creativity

Musicians consistently express the intentional blending of diverse cultural elements as a means to innovate and elevate their creative expressions. Cultural fusion is demonstrated through the deliberate incorporation of instruments, melodic motifs, and rhythmic patterns from various ethnic traditions. This intentional amalgamation results in compositions that transcend the boundaries of individual ethnic styles, fostering a dynamic musical language that resonates with both tradition and contemporaneity. The musicians articulate how cultural fusion serves as a catalyst for their creativity, providing them with a rich palette of sonic possibilities. The synergy of traditional elements from different ethnic communities fuels a continual evolution of Guizhou's musical landscape, reflecting a harmonious coexistence of cultural identities within the compositions.

#### 2. Impact on the Listener's Perception

Through interviews and observations, it becomes evident that audiences appreciate the fusion of diverse cultural elements, finding resonance in the harmonious coexistence of traditions within a single musical piece. The intentional blending of traditional sounds with contemporary influences serves to captivate listeners, offering a fresh and engaging sonic experience. The findings suggest that cultural fusion enhances the accessibility and relatability of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, attracting a broader audience that may include individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, the study indicates that listeners often perceive cultural fusion as a bridge between heritage and modernity, fostering a deeper connection to the music and its cultural roots. The impact on the listener's perception underscores the transformative potential of cultural fusion in expanding the reach and appreciation of Guizhou's ethnic music traditions.

## VI. Discussion and Implications

The examination of compositional techniques and the role of cultural fusion within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music presents a rich tapestry of creative expressions that resonate with both tradition and innovation. The findings underscore the significance of cultural fusion as a potent force shaping the musical landscape, fostering creativity among local musicians from the Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui ethnic groups.

1. **Cultural Fusion as a Catalyst for Creativity:** Cultural fusion emerges as a dynamic catalyst for compositional creativity, providing local musicians with a reservoir of diverse elements to draw upon. The intentional blending of traditional instruments, melodic motifs, and rhythmic patterns from different ethnic traditions amplifies the creative palette, enabling musicians to craft compositions that transcend conventional boundaries. This synthesis of cultural elements not only preserves the essence of individual ethnic styles but also catalyzes a continual process of musical innovation. The study suggests that cultural fusion serves as a bridge between heritage and contemporary creativity, empowering musicians to navigate the delicate balance between tradition and novelty.

2. **Impact on the Listener's Perception:** The impact of cultural fusion on the listener's perception is a key dimension discussed in the findings. Audiences appreciate the fusion of diverse cultural elements, finding resonance in the

harmonious coexistence of traditions within a single musical piece. This impact extends beyond the immediate community, attracting a broader audience that spans ethnic backgrounds. The study suggests that cultural fusion enhances the accessibility and relatability of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, contributing to the preservation and appreciation of cultural heritage. The music becomes a bridge that connects listeners to the past while embracing the contemporary, fostering a sense of inclusivity and shared cultural identity.

3. **Preservation and Evolution of Cultural Identity:** The discussion highlights the dual role of cultural fusion in both preserving and evolving cultural identity within Guizhou's ethnic music traditions. While musicians express a deep commitment to preserving traditional elements, the intentional integration of external influences ensures the music remains relevant and adaptive to contemporary contexts. This delicate balance reflects the resilience of Guizhou's cultural identity, illustrating how cultural fusion becomes a means of transmitting heritage to future generations while allowing for organic evolution.

4. **Global Significance and Cross-Cultural Understanding:** The implications of this study extend beyond the local context, shedding light on the global significance of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. Cultural fusion, as evidenced in compositional techniques, positions this music as a powerful medium for fostering cross-cultural understanding. By embracing diversity and intentionally incorporating elements from various ethnic traditions, Guizhou's musicians contribute to a global dialogue on the transformative potential of cultural fusion in the realm of music.

In conclusion, the discussion and implications drawn from the findings emphasize the multifaceted nature of cultural fusion within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music. The interplay between tradition and innovation, the impact on audience perception, the preservation and evolution of cultural identity, and the global significance underscore the dynamic and transformative role of cultural fusion in shaping the musical expressions of Guizhou's diverse ethnic communities. This study not only contributes to the understanding of Guizhou's musical heritage but also provides insights that resonate with broader discussions on the intersection of tradition, innovation, and cultural exchange in the realm of global music.

## VII. Conclusion

In exploring the compositional techniques within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music and the transformative role of cultural fusion, this study has unveiled a vibrant and dynamic musical landscape. Local musicians from the Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui ethnic groups emerge as custodians of a rich cultural heritage, navigating the delicate balance between tradition and innovation. Cultural fusion, identified as a catalyst for creativity, infuses the music with a unique tapestry of sounds, blending traditional instruments, melodic motifs, and rhythmic patterns from diverse ethnic traditions.

The intentional integration of cultural elements not only serves as a bridge between the past and the present but also resonates with global audiences, contributing to cross-cultural understanding. The impact on the listener's perception highlights the accessibility and relatability of Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, fostering a sense of inclusivity and shared cultural identity. As musicians intentionally adapt traditional materials to contemporary contexts, cultural fusion becomes a transformative force, ensuring the music's relevance while preserving its authenticity. The study underscores the dual nature of cultural fusion in Guizhou's ethnic music traditions—acting as both a preserver of cultural identity and a catalyst for evolution. The resilience of Guizhou's cultural identity is evident in the intentional preservation of traditional elements, while the incorporation of external influences ensures adaptability and continued creativity. In a global context, the findings contribute to broader discussions on the power of music as a medium for cultural exchange and understanding. Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music stands as a testament to the transformative potential of cultural fusion, inviting us to appreciate the intricate interplay between tradition and innovation in the realm of global music.

It is essential to acknowledge certain limitations. Firstly, the study's generalizability may be limited due to the focus on specific ethnic groups within Guizhou, namely the Miao, Dong, Yi, and Shui communities. The findings may not fully represent the diversity within the broader spectrum of ethnic minority music in the region. Additionally, relying on qualitative methods, such as interviews, introduces a potential for subjectivity and bias, as participants may provide responses influenced by personal perspectives or cultural expectations. Furthermore, the study's temporal scope is another limitation; it captures a snapshot of compositional techniques and cultural fusion at a specific point in time, potentially missing the evolution of these practices over more extended periods. Cultural Syncretism Theory provides a useful framework, but it may not capture all nuances of the complex interplay between cultural elements, and alternative theoretical perspectives could offer additional insights. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and contemplating the broader implications of the study.

It becomes evident that Guizhou's ethnic musicians are not merely composers but cultural ambassadors, forging connections between diverse communities and shaping a musical narrative that transcends geographic and cultural boundaries. The study encourages further exploration and appreciation of the nuanced and dynamic expressions within Guizhou Ethnic Minority Music, inviting scholars, musicians, and enthusiasts alike to delve into the profound intersection of tradition, innovation, and cultural exchange in the realm of music.

**About the author:** Huang Yuxiang, male, born in May 1983, a native of Leiyang City, Hunan Province. Currently pursuing a doctoral degree at Philippine Women's University, he holds the position of Associate Professor and serves as the Director of the Music Theory Research Department at the School of Music and Dance, Kaili University, specializing in composition and composition technique theory.

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