

# The Translation and Interpretation of Tujia Love Songs “Young Girl” and “Got up in the Early Morning”

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## To cite this article:

Ru Ying, Li Bin. The Translation and Interpretation of Tujia Love Songs “Young Girl” and “Got up in the Early Morning”. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Special Issue: *Translation and Interpretation of 28 Chinese Tujia Minority Ballads*. Vol. 9, No. 6, 2021, pp. 305-311. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20210906.18

**Received:** September 30, 2021; **Accepted:** November 11, 2021; **Published:** November 23, 2021

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**Abstract:** Tujia Minority is a significant ethnic group in Enshi, Hubei province. Its love songs constitute a large part of Enshi folk songs and exhibit a wealth of artistic and cultural connotations. This article provides translations of two Tujia love songs, “*Young Girl*” and “*Got up in the Early Morning*,” discusses the meanings and functions of the songs’ essential liner notes; and interprets the songs from a cultural perspective. It combines both translation and cultural theories to help readers better understand Tujia folk songs and Tujia culture. When translating Tujia love songs, we should consider the meanings and functions of liners notes as well as the rhythms of each line of the lyrics. Furthermore, the lyrics and liner notes embody cultural meanings that demonstrate Tujia people’s attitudes towards love and life resulting from Tujia’s history and natural environment. Tujia love songs are the result of the fusion of literature and music and have social implications. They reflect Tujia young people’s attitudes towards love and marriage and are inextricably linked to Tujia’s daily life. With an interpretation of these love songs, readers will better understand the Tujia people’s life and history and then realize the significance of Tujia folk songs in Chinese folk culture.

**Keywords:** Tujia Love Songs, Liner Notes, Attitudes Towards Love and Marriage

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## 1. Introduction

Hubei Enshi generally includes the Autonomous Prefecture of Enshi Tujia and Miao, Enshi City’s capital. It is one of Hubei province’s 13 prefecture-level administrative regions. Enshi is a mountainous region in the Wushan Mountains<sup>1</sup>, with rugged, rolling terrains and numerous high peaks and ravines that make farming difficult. As a result, collective farming was widespread in Enshi, and it was usual to see a dozen or more people working in the fields together. Because ethnic groups in Enshi did not have their written language, they passed on their culture through songs. Enshi folk songs were born against this backdrop. They document Enshi’s history and evolution, covering food and living, clothing, disease treatment, weddings and funerals, prayers for gods and protection from disasters, folk customs and taboos, and festive

rituals. They are used for various purposes, including organizing labor, inspiring others, and delighting and amusing. As a result, Enshi folk songs are inextricably linked to the daily lives of the Enshi people. Due to its remote location and lack of communication, Enshi people relied on mountains and rivers for food. These natural objects provide an infinite supply of resources, both physically and spiritually. Thus, Enshi folk songs are inextricably linked to such natural phenomena as mountains and streams, flowers and fruits, trees, birds, animals, the sun and moon, stars and clouds, rain, thunder, and so on. Numerous Enshi folk songs have titles that embody geographical features, living environments, customs, and social emotions.

Tujia Minority has a long history and mainly lives in the adjacent areas of Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing, and Guizhou provinces. In this geographical environment and historical civilization, Tujia ancestors created unique folk songs. Tujia folk songs contain a significant number of love songs. Tujia Minority people live primarily in mountainous areas with

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<sup>1</sup> Wushan, nowadays, mainly refers to the mountains that run across the border of Hubei, Chongqing, and Hunan.

limited transportation and a sparse population. The households are dispersed throughout the mountains and along rivers, posing a problem for marriage among Tujia young men and women and impeding Tujia's continuation. As a result, in Tujia culture, “when men and women farm in and out, regardless of affinity, they travel together; when they meet on the road, regardless of sex, they sing to court each other.” [1] When men and women cross mountains to work together, it is natural for them to get to know and fall in love with one another through songs. Every year, they will host a grand weaving dance party, a temple fair, and other notable events (due to geographical conditions and social control restrictions, this activity is relatively rare in urban areas). After the large-scale activities, men and women will gather in groups, in the field or in the mountains, to express their feelings through love songs, free to choose their life partners.

Tujia love songs have attracted much attention from scholars in music, sociology, and comparative translation. Much research has been done to explore the characteristics of Tujia love songs. They are generally divided into solo and duet from the perspective of subtypes, each of which has its specific features. For example, in a solo, a young man or woman often expresses his or her love to the beloved. The song is comparatively shorter and simpler. A duet is composed of several stanzas with richer content in them. Apart from showing affection, a man and a woman may express attitudes and exchange promises in a duet. Sometimes in a duet, a chorus appears, which enriches the melodic effect of the song and expresses the long-lasting love between the young man and woman [2]. As for the length of Tujia love songs, “five-sentence” ballads occupy a unique part [3]. A “five-sentence” ballad is composed of five lines of lyrics. It has a long history, dating back to the ancient folk songs in the *Book of Psalms*. Though this structure could be seen in folk songs of different parts of China, it mainly appears in the Enshi district [4].

Given its importance in Tujia folk songs, scholars have discussed the cultural connotations of Tujia love songs from various perspectives. Through the analysis of the evolution of Tujia love songs, Wang summarized three national characteristics reflected in them. The first is the pursuit of freedom of marriage and resistance to feudal oppression [5]. Before the bureaucratization of native officers<sup>2</sup>, Tujia people expressed their thoughts through songs due to a lack of written language. At that time, their love songs were bold, frank, sincere, natural, and optimistic. Though the process of feudalization promoted social development, it also stifled ethnic culture. For example, free love in the Tujia minority was replaced by feudal thoughts such as “parental orders” or “well-matched families.” Therefore, Tujia love songs then reflected rebellion and resistance to such ideas and the restrictions to free minds. Second is the value of love and

righteousness and opposition against snobbery. Due to the influence of the natural environment, the Tujia people lived in the closed mountainous area for a long time, influencing Tujia people's character. Their lyrics often express their feelings through the metaphorical use of local objects. The third is comfort with agrarian life. As stated above, many Tujia love songs were sung during labor work, so their expression of love was always combined with happy and contented attitudes towards their work. Similarly, scholars explored the attitudes towards love and marriage embodied in Tujia love songs. They agreed that Tujia love songs expressed the pure, frank, and diligent inner world of Tujia people and that their love songs demonstrate Tujia people's faithfulness and honesty [6, 4]. Scholars in sociology pointed out the guiding role of Tujia love songs, especially the reflected attitudes towards marriage. Specifically, they value love and virtue more than money, pursue the unity of love and marriage, and encourage women to pursue passion bravely. Furthermore, the love songs demonstrate that Tujia men adore pure and cheerful women, which is a straightforward aesthetic orientation [7].

Given their special liner notes and rich cultural connotations of Tujia love songs, translating and interpreting them is crucial for understanding the beauty of ethnic cultures. First, this essay aims to discuss how liner notes should be understood and translated and how they function in these two songs. It then interprets the two songs from a cultural perspective, exploring Tujia people's personalities and love attitudes. The translation and interpretation can help readers understand Tujia culture in Enshi, China, and appreciate the beauty of minority folk songs.

## 2. Literature Review

This paper translates and interprets two Tujia love songs, so research on translation theories related to Tujia love songs and studies of Tujia love songs should both be reviewed.

### 2.1. The Liner Notes in Tujia Love Songs

The term “liner words” or “liner notes” is widely used in folk songs to refer to words or phrases that play a supporting role in folk songs. The Chinese Dictionary of Music defines: “The lyrics of folk songs in China are often interspersed with some tone words, which are called liner words, liner phrases or lines according to the number of words used. In notation, the phrases are usually put in parentheses to distinguish them from the lyrics. They play an important role in vividly expressing the thoughts and feelings of the song and is an indispensable part of its musical structure.” The liner words of folk songs can reflect the genre characteristics of folk songs, strengthen the tone, enliven the rhythm, enhance the atmosphere, and enrich the music [8]. As a significant music feature in Tujia folk songs and love songs, liner words have attracted much attention from scholars in music, linguistics, and translation.

Due to historical and geographical reasons, Tujia people believed in witchcraft and emphasized witchcraft rituals. Today, many of the Tujia folk songs are inextricably linked to ancient witchcraft and incantations, and we can still see their

2 The bureaucratization of native officers means abolishing Tusi (or tu-szu, also known as Headmen or Chieftains, where tribal leaders are recognized as imperial officials by the Yuan, Ming, and Qing-era Chinese governments) in the minority areas of southwest China. The central government appoints exile officials to rule directly and implement the same local administrative system as in the mainland.

“divine colors” through the liner notes of the folk songs. In his article, Cai [9] studied the liner words in Tujia folk songs and concluded that the liner words are the standardized codes of life and the cultural symbol system of “super-meanings.” The six types of liner notes discussed in his paper were six spiritual links between the Tujia and the Ba<sup>3</sup> religious worlds. They were essentially incantations that have been mutilated and adapted to folk songs. The author’s interpretation unleashed the spiritual energy within the system and captured something previously tricky for us to grasp [9, 10]. Apart from religious connotations, liner words also bear other cultural meanings. For example, liner words are the remanent of the Tujia language. As Tujia nationality has no written language, liner words in folk songs maintained some linguistic features of Tujia dialect, especially when folk songs and art forms are under the impact of multiculturalism. Therefore, liner words bear robust ethnic features [11].

Although liner words in Tujia folk songs have no practical meaning, they become an integral part of the songs once sung with the main lyrics. They play a role in complementing the rhythm and enhancing the artistic effect and have a specific aesthetic connotation in the musical expression of the ethnic group. Shan analyzed the subtle and meaningful mood, the lyrical beauty, and the structural beauty of liner words in Tujia folk songs from aesthetics [12]. He concluded that liner words are indispensable for Tujia folk songs and should be inherited. Functionally, liner words have a whole expressive meaning as well as an essential structural meaning. First, liner words strengthen the connection between folk songs and real-life; they highlight their unique style and local characteristics. Some liner words are rhythmical imitations of labor chants in practice, and some are labor chants passed down. Second, liner words add extra tone to liven up the mood. They have no specific meaning in themselves, but their use can further strengthen the feelings and atmosphere of the songs. Last, liner words, combined with main lyrics, create a vivid musical image for listeners [8].

According to the position of liner notes in lyrics, they are mainly used at the beginning, middle, or end of a song. The liner notes at the beginning determine the style and mood of the whole music and provide a musical setting for introducing the main lyrics, thus leaving a deep impression on listeners. Liner words in the middle or at the end of the songs are used to expand the structure of the whole song and better express feelings and emotions. Besides, they can also be employed to connect the structure or balance the structure [13].

In summary, liner words in Tujia folk songs are a linguistic art that directly influences folk songs’ structure. They play an indispensable role in embellishing and beautifying the melody, creating a unique mood of Tujia folk songs, and giving people a beautiful enjoyment.

## 2.2. The Translation of Tujia Folk Songs

Though Tujia folk songs are of great importance in Chinese folk culture, scant literature is available to translate Tujia folk songs. Most of the literature is empirical studies, discussing how to translate or apply specific translation theories to Tujia folk songs. For example, Ou [14] took Hubei folk songs as an example and analyzed how to translate them under the wave of *Going Globally*. He suggested that the translated lyrics should be catchy to be accepted and appreciated by readers. So, the original rhyme could be changed to reproduce the flavor, thereby making it easy to understand. As for the unique phenomenon of liner notes in folk songs, the author proposed translating them phonetically since they often do not have specific meanings but convey feelings. Xu [15] applied multi-modal discourse in English translation to Tujia folk song *Long Chuan Diao* and argued that this song should be translated from four aspects: cultural level, context level, content level, and expressive level. She emphasized that multi-modal discourse and Tujia folk songs are interdependent and complementary, and the latter can help better understand the former.

As reviewed in the above section, liner words or liner notes are indispensable for Tujia folk songs. Therefore, a larger number of studies focus on the translation of liner notes among the literature. Based on Relevance Theory, which advocates that human communication is explicit-inferential, the author similarly proposes that in the translation of Tujia folk songs, adequate and explicit description, no matter linguistic or musical, should be provided to make the translation understandable. Therefore, the translation of liner notes should not be achieved at the expense of misunderstanding. Instead, they should be translated flexibly, and the transliteration strategy should be used as much as possible without causing misunderstanding or difficulty in understanding [16].

In summary, when translating Tujia love songs, we should pay attention to both its lyrics and liner notes in order to provide a faithful and melodic translation. When it comes to appreciation, we should consider the historical and cultural contexts of the songs to get a comprehensive understanding of them.

## 3. Translation and Interpretation of the Two Songs

In this section, translations of the two songs are first offered, and then respective interpretations are provided to understand the songs better.

### 3.1. Yao Yi Mei (Young Girl)

#### Chinese Version

yāo yī mèi  
幺姨妹

yāo yī mèi mén qián (luō) yī huā tái (luō)  
幺姨妹门前 (啰) 一花台 (啰)

huā er (nà) tiān tiān (lèi) yāo (ā) yī  
花儿 (那) 天天 (嘞) 幺 (啊) 姨

#### English Translation

Young Girl

Before the girl’s gate  
(lo) flowers grow

(Ah) young girl,  
blossoms (there)

3 The history of Ba nationality can be dated back to 4000 years ago. It was an ancient tribe living in Chongqing, Hubei, and Sichuan, and they were called the Ba people. The ancient Ba people created an ancient civilization in the Yangtze River valley comparable to the culture of the Central Plains. However, more than two thousand years ago, Ba was occupied by Qin and was then under the political control of the Qin dynasty.

mèi  
妹  
yō wō yō wō wō dāi lù (ā) kāi (ya)  
哟喔哟喔喔带露 (啊) 开 (呀)  
yāo (ā) yí mèi yāo (ā) yí mèi  
幺 (啊) 妹妹幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō dāi lù (ā) kāi (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔带露 (啊) 开 (哟)  
nā tiān shēn shǒu āi cǎi yí duǒ (lō)  
那天伸手 (哎) 采一朵 (啰)  
rú jīn xiāng qì (yē) yāo (ā) yí mèi  
如今香气 (耶) 幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō mǎn xiōng (ā) huái (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔满胸 (啊) 怀 (哟)  
yāo (ā) yí mèi yāo (ā) yí mèi  
幺 (啊) 妹妹幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō mǎn xiōng (ā) huái (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔满胸 (啊) 怀 (哟)  
xīn xiǎng lián gēn (lō) chā qǐ lái (yō)  
心想连根 (啰) 扯起来 (哟)  
yòu pà huā xiè (lō) yāo (ā) yí mèi  
又怕花谢 (啰) 幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō zài bù (ā) kāi (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔再不 (啊) 开 (哟)  
yāo (ā) yí mèi yāo (ā) yí mèi  
幺 (啊) 妹妹幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō zài bù (ā) kāi (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔再不 (啊) 开 (哟)  
zuó yè mèng lǐ (yō) hǎo kuài āi (lō)  
昨夜梦里 (哟) 好快哉 (啰)  
wǒ biàn gè mì fēng āi yāo (ā) yí mèi  
我变个蜜蜂 (哎) 幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō hǎo zì (ya) zài (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔好自 (呀) 在 (哟)  
yāo (ā) yí mèi yāo (ā) yí mèi  
幺 (啊) 妹妹幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō hǎo zì (ya) zài (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔好自 (呀) 在 (哟)  
mì fēng fēi dào (yō) huā bān shàng (lō)  
蜜蜂飞到 (哟) 花瓣上 (啰)  
huān huān xī xī (yē) yāo (ā) yí mèi  
欢欢喜喜 (耶) 幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō bǎ mǐ (yō) cǎi (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔把蜜 (哟) 采 (哟)  
yāo (ā) yí mèi yāo (ā) yí mèi  
幺 (啊) 妹妹幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō bǎ mǐ (ya) cǎi (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔把蜜 (呀) 采 (哟)  
yāo (ā) yí mèi yāo (ā) yí mèi  
幺 (啊) 妹妹幺 (啊) 妹妹  
yō wō yō wō wō bǎ mǐ (ya) cǎi (yō)  
哟喔哟喔喔把蜜 (呀) 采 (哟)

everyday  
(yoo woo yoo wo-o)  
with dew (ah) blow  
(Ah) The young girl!  
(Ah) The young girl!  
(yoo woo yoo wo-o)  
with dew (ah) blow  
Plucked a flower (lo)  
days ago  
(Ah) Young girl,  
aromas (yeah) overflow  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o, my  
bosom (yoo)  
Ah, young girl! Ah,  
young girl!  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o, my  
bosom (yoo)  
Wished to pull it up  
(yoo)  
(Ah) young girl, it  
would wither though  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o, and  
never blow  
Ah, young girl! Ah,  
young girl!  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o,  
never (ah) blow  
So pleasant a dream  
(lo) it could be  
Ah, young girl! I  
became (yoo) a bee  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o, so  
merry and free  
Ah, young girl! Ah,  
young girl!  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o, so  
merry and free  
Flew onto the petals,  
(yoo) the bee  
Ah, young girl, (yoo)  
with glee  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o, to  
get honey  
Ah, young girl! Ah,  
young girl.  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o, to  
get honey  
Ah, young girl! Ah,  
young girl.  
Yoo woo yoo wo-o, to  
get honey

grandparents usually call their loved children or grandchildren “yao er” (youngest kids) regardless of gender and age. Especially the only child of a family, elders call them “yao er” to show care and love. In Tujia culture, Tujia people usually add “youngest (yao)” before the names of their beloved ones regardless of age ranking. Therefore, it is common to see titles such as “yao mei er” or “yao yi mei” (both refer to young girls/maidens) in Tujia folk songs. *Yao Mei er Guides You Around* and *My Dear Yao Mei er* are some of the well-known Tujia folk songs. Naturally these titles refer to unmarried females and often appear in love songs from young men. The title was translated as “young girl” instead of the youngest girl since it is a term of endearment, not referring to age. The title indicates that this song is a solo from a young man expressing his affection for a girl he loves.

### 3.1.2. Rich and Expressive Liner Words

This song is a “courting song,” which means expressing a young man’s love for a girl and courting the girl with the song. It has twenty-seven lines and is full of liner notes. As reviewed in pervious section, liner notes in Tujia folk songs play an indispensable role in understanding and interpreting them. The liner notes appear at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of each line, each functioning in its own way. From the perspective of types, liner notes in this song are primarily tone auxiliaries. Tone auxiliaries are the most common in Tujia folk songs, complementing the syllables and strengthening the tones. They mainly include “ah”, “an”, “oh”, “wow”, etc. In this song, there are many tone auxiliaries, and transliteration is adopted.

Example (1): huā er nà tiān tiān lei yāo ā yí mèi  
花儿 (那) 天天 (嘞) 幺 (啊) 妹妹

Flowers (nah) everyday (lei) young (ah) girl

In this line, liner words “nah,” “lei,” “ah” are all tone auxiliaries. They do not have specific meanings but are important in extending the tone. In folk songs, when the main lyrics and cadences cannot fully express the feelings, singers often extend the melody to strengthen its expressiveness so that the feelings can be fully expressed. So, in translation, these liner words were translated phonetically. Similarly, liner words such as “yoo,” “oh,” “yeah,” “yah,” which are repeatedly used in other lines, were all translated phonetically so that the original rhyme and melody will not be changed.

Another point that should be noticed is that the lyrics are the same in line 4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 26.

Example (2): yāo (ā) yí mèi yāo (ā) yí mèi

Yao (ah) yi mei yao (ah) yi mei

Ah, young girl! Ah, young girl.

When translating this line, the liner word “ah” was moved to the beginning. The reasons are as follows: first, the two words are used to strengthen the song’s expressiveness, and this line functions the same way. With “ah” at the beginning, it is easy to attract listeners’ attention, and the structure is familiar to westerners [15]. Second, by moving “ah” to the beginning, the endearment of “yao yi mei” (young girl) will not be separated.

The words “yoo woo yoo wo-o” appeared eleven times in this song. When used at the beginning of a line, they are long

#### 3.1.1. The Title: Straightforward and Affectionate

The title of the song is “Yao Yi Mei,” which literally means “young girl.” “Yao” in Sichuan and Hubei dialects means the youngest. There is an ancient saying in Sichuan and Hubei provinces: “The emperor favors the eldest, while the common people love the youngest.” So, if someone is the youngest of a family, he or she is the favorite of all. However, even

and far-reaching, enhancing the rhythm and making the melody more vivid. The repeated use of these liner words shows the artistic charm of the Tujia love songs, which deeply expresses the mood of expecting attention from the girl and the return of love. If these liner words are removed, the song's expressiveness will be significantly weakened, and the song will lose its charm. Still, the music's integrity will also be destroyed, which may even make it impossible to sing the song. Furthermore, repetition is an important method in Tujia folk songs. Repetition can express strong and sincere thoughts and feelings, emphasizing the theme and enhancing the melodic beauty.

In a word, the clever use of these liner words makes it particularly vivid and exciting and enhances the expressive power of the song. The song is cheerful and lively, the lyrics are catchy, highlighting the beautiful and simple image of Tujia young man courting a young woman. The lyric is colloquial and straightforward, and the liner notes are many. The melody is undulating and has a wide sound range, so it can better enliven the atmosphere, express emotions, and express the deep feelings of the singers. The liner notes are not directly related to the main lyrics, nor are they part of the basic stanza, but they can be sung together to express distinctive emotions.

### 3.1.3. The Beauty of Metaphors in Tujia Love Songs

In Tujia culture, "flower" represents charm and youthful vitality, and Tujia girls are a flower in the hearts of the Tujia people. Therefore, in this song, "flowers in blossom" refer to young, attractive girls. Besides, "a flower with dew" leaves the impression of tenderness and youthfulness, inviting people to pick it up. Therefore, in the song, the man picks up a flower, and then its fragrance lingers for a long time. Here, the fragrance also refers to young girls' beauty and attraction to men. "Aromas overflow my heart" literally means the man cannot forget the girl's beauty, thus expressing his love for the girl. "Pulling it up" will, without any doubt, lead to the withering of the flower, so in the song, it says, "it would wither and never blow." However, here it is a euphemism, implying that a man cannot win a girl's love without patience. Otherwise, he may lose the girl's love forever. Subsequently, the third part of the song elaborates the man's feelings with the description of a dream. In the dream, the man has become a "bee" gathering honey happily and merrily, which shows euphemistic sexual intentions. As we all know, bees are selective in collecting nectar from flowers. Normally, they do not collect flowers that are in the bud or just open. They pick flowers in full bloom when the nectar or secretions are more abundant. So, it, on the one hand, implies the girl's beauty and, on the other hand, shows the man's desire for the girl. With metaphors, this song is more subtle and shows impulsiveness and wildness that try to break the taboo of human nature. This impulsiveness and wildness are reflected in the sexual intentions of the love song.

Furthermore, "dream" implies imagination, blending the real and imaginary contexts in the song. While the actual scene can be observed, the imagined scene needs emotional

conception. "Flowers with dew" are associated with youthful girls, which is the first layer of imagination because flowers and young females are both tender and beautiful. "Pulling the flower" up is the second layer of imagination, indicating a hasty attitude towards love. Based on real-life experience, we can easily empathize with the damages caused by pulling up flowers. The young man's dream of "becoming a bee getting honey" is the third layer of imagination, an extension, and expansion of the association. Nothing can be achieved overnight. It is impossible to possess flowers by just plucking them and happy days require waiting. Though simple, this song creates endless space for imagination, reinforcing readers' feelings.

Before the bureaucratization of native officers, young Tujia men and women were in a social environment of freedom of love and marriage. Men like to show their artistic talent through singing and to attract women's attention so as to win women's love. This sentiment is not found in the feudalized Han Chinese but is in line with Tujia's tradition of "songs as matchmakers." Men and women in love would use songs to make bold sexual suggestions. It explicitly or implicitly points out the sexual intentions in love life and vividly recreates the various feelings of Tujia young people.

## 3.2. Got Up in the Early Morning

### Chinese Version

qīngchén qǐ chuáng bǎ chuáng xià  
清晨起床把床下

qīngzǎo qǐ lái bǎ chuáng (luō) xià (ā)  
清早起来把床 (啰) 下 (啊)

shǒu ná shù zǐ shū tóu (luō) fā (ā)  
手拿梳子梳头 (啰) 发 (啊)

qiánmiàn hū dé (nà āi) yī pǐ (dì) wǎ  
前面梳得 (那哎) 一匹 (地) 瓦

hòumiàn (nà ge) shū dé (nà ge) yàn wěi  
后面 (那个) 梳得 (那个) 燕尾  
(luō...ā) bā (yō)  
(啰...啊) 巴 (哟)

wǒ wàng láng tóu shàng (āi āi āi) yī duǒ  
(我) 望郎头上 (哎哎哎) 一朵  
(āi huā) (yō hēi yō hēi)  
(哎) 花 (哟嘿哟嘿)

### English Translation

Got up in the Early Morning

Early morning (ah) I got off my bed

With a comb (lo) I tidied up my head

Combed like (na-ai) a tile for my front hair

A swallow (ah) tail (yoo) for my back hair (there) instead

On my man's head (ai-ah-ai) I saw a flower red

### 3.2.1. The "Five-sentences" Ballad

In the previous part, we have discussed Tujia young people's attitudes towards love and marriage, which are also demonstrated in "five-sentence" ballads since they constitute a significant part of Tujia love songs. The themes range from courting a girl, expressing lovesickness to showing expectations of their beloved ones. A "five-sentence" ballad has a unique structure form, which means it has only five sentences. This is quite different from classical Chinese poetry and folk songs, most of which have four or eight lines, and the beauty lies in the symmetry of the words and structure. Though a "five-sentence" ballad breaks the symmetry, it creates a new beauty of liveliness and novelty. As for the song "Get up in the Early Morning", it has five lines, and all these five lines rhymed "a" (xia, fa, wa, ba, hua) in Chinese. But when translating, to make its meaning complete, the rhythms were changed to "/d/" except for the third line. The language is

easy and catchy. In order not to break the rhythm, the liner notes at the end of each sentence were omitted during translation.

This song tells that a woman gets up in the early morning and gets off her bed. Then she brushed her hair with a comb in hand. The third and fourth sentences offer the details of hair-combing, and the last sentence, as stated by Liu, is the focal point of the whole song [4]. The first four lines describe what the woman is doing, and the last sentence says, “*On my man’s head I saw a flower red*,” which highlights this is a love song and expresses the woman’s love for her beloved man. The “flowers” in Chinese folk songs are primarily associated with love between a man and a woman, and they convey the atmosphere of adoration, passionate love, parting, and longing. Here, the flower is not to show a girl’s beauty but a man’s attraction. The last line shows that when the girl was combing her hair in the early morning, she began to think of her lover, who, in her eyes, was as attractive as flowers.

As reviewed in section 2, the “five-sentence” ballad is typical of Tujia love songs. As a kind of folk song, they are composed by Tujia people in everyday life, strongly improvised. From this song, we can vividly imagine a young Tujia woman singing a song while combing her hair in the early morning, a typical example of Tujia people’s talent in improvising songs.

### 3.2.2. Tujia Women’s Freedom of Love

Tujia females, as a rule, choose different hairstyles according to different ages and different identities. For example, little girls mostly tie the pigtails on the top of their heads, which look innocent, lively, and cute. Maidens wear a long braid, tied with a red headband, and a flowery square scarf, which signifies being unmarried (As shown in figure 1: a). But they also often change their hairstyles with different seasons and circumstances to show their youthful beauty. When they are about to get married as brides, the night before the wedding, the maiden’s family will carefully comb them a hairstyle they think looks best, which is one of the most ancient rituals of the Tujia wedding customs ---- “do up the hair.” Once the bride has her hair “done up,” it means that she has been a married woman since then. When a Tujia girl prepares to get married, she must “do up her hair.” As for married women, the most popular hairstyle is the “Baba”<sup>4</sup> style, which is dignified and gentle.

In this song, it says, “a tile” and “a swallowtail,” which indicates that this is a young woman who is not married yet, because she combed her hair in a complicated and fashionable way, different from a simple long braid or “baba” style after marriage. We can speculate that the young woman is in deep love, and she misses her man when she gets up in the early morning. While combing her hair or dressing herself up, she keeps her man in her heart, which echoes the ancient Chinese saying, “A girl will doll herself up for him who loves her.”



Figure 1. Hairstyles of Tujia females.<sup>5</sup>

In a social environment where songs were used for matchmaking, young Tujia men and women were rarely influenced by social, family, and financial factors regarding love and marriage. They may fall in love with each other and choose their spouses more freely through love songs. Love songs as a matchmaker provided young men and women with favorable conditions for direct communication. Both sides could genuinely reveal themselves and communicate with each other through face-to-face singing. In such a marital context, human nature and human emotions were expressed more freely; especially the mentality and personality of Tujia women were frankly displayed. They were bold in revealing their inner secrets, shy but not restrained, and brave in pursuing the man they had an affection for, which fully demonstrated the equal rights of Tujia women and men in marriage. Their moral and romantic views were reflected in their love songs, which were very pure and straightforward. Therefore, in this song, we can see that though the lyrics are not very bold, the young woman’s love for the man is easy to understand. First, she started to miss her man in the early morning; second, to attract her man, she tried to look more beautiful by doing her hair; third, she expressed her longing for her man in the last sentence.

## 4. Conclusion

The folk songs of the Enshi Tujia are the fruits of the combination of literature and music. They mirror Tujia people’s life and are one of the most representative forms of Tujia art in Enshi and occupy a significant position in Tujia folk literature. The folk songs are rich in content and closely related to the working people’s daily lives, with various forms of expression, unique style, musical and straightforward language, reflecting the public’s thoughts, feelings, wishes, and aesthetic interests. They enrich people’s spiritual world and influence people’s behaviors subtly.

This paper provides translations of two Tujia love songs and interpretations from a cultural perspective. First, when translating the songs, importance should be given to liner notes, which function structurally and culturally. These common liner words indirectly express the thoughts and

<sup>4</sup> Baba is the special food of the Tujia people. It is round, symbolizing “completeness,” and golden in color, symbolizing “prosperity.” Hence, it is one of the most popular foods for the Tujia people to honor the gods and send to their friends on New Year’s Day.

<sup>5</sup> <http://m.qulishi.com/news/201607/88139.html>



feelings of the Tujia people, deepen the expression of emotions, and show the unique lyrical effect of Tujia folk songs. The clever use of liner notes indicates Tujia people's artistry. Furthermore, these songs bear rich cultural meanings, especially Tujia people's attitudes towards love and marriage. The songs should be understood under the historical and cultural context of the Tujia Minority, which offers a more comprehensive perspective to interpret them. When we listen to these original and creative Tujia love songs, we need to realize their significance and make efforts to preserve the folk culture.

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