



Professor Lan Lan Wang:

"Singing and dancing is very much a part of indigenous people's lives. Unlike us in America, we just work, work in front of the computer, and the work is separate from life. But for them, because of the nature around them and the way their life is, therefore their art is intertwined with life itself.

I am Lan Lan Wang. I am a professor of dance at Connecticut College. The troupe's name is Yunnan Indigenous Musicians and Dancers.

Yunnan is situated in the southwest corner of China. It's mountainous, from the high altitude of over 10,000 feet sloping down to approximately 100 feet. In this land there are four major rivers. Throughout history, the indigenous people have lived in this area and they have been isolated from the outside world.

China is a country comprised of the majority of Han people. Diversity means people who are different from the majority. Yunnan Province, the majority of the Yi people living there. The Yi ethnic group, they have found a place to live and many of them probably crossed the border from other places. They have founded their living environment and created their own culture.

For example, they sing when they're harvesting. The movement cultivates such a kind of rhythm. They start making up songs and they start humming and they started creating movements. That's how indigenous cultures are created.

When the men and women encounter each other, instead of using dialogue they presented with songs. So their courtships are expressed through songs. I think the songs celebrate life and celebrate joy and celebrate their feelings for each other.

The Yi music, they do have their specific styles. For example, the [indiscernible], the woman came out with this long, sustained voice – that one single tone. She discovered she can sustain it so long through practice, through discovery and through her own self-expression. They use a different pitch and they use the different length of the tone and they also created a melody by fusion of the complexity of the natural tone of voices. But they're singing in their own native language.

For the Yi people, they believe in fire. For example, they have the torch festival that celebrates their new year. People gathered around the torch, the bonfire, they celebrate, they sing and they dance for hours, hours, in the day and night. Fire is a symbol of hope for them and also a symbol of prosperity.

The Yi ethnic group, they live surrounded by woods. So a lot of their instruments are actually made from trees.

The [indiscernible] guitar, it is a four-stringed guitar. They play with a pick. Then they use the tree trunk to make the body of this particular instrument. On the top there's a dragon's head. Dragon's association with fire. It has a very particular sound.

These people respect history tremendously. Even in some of the ethnic groups in Yunnan, they do not have their own language. Therefore for them wanting to express the history of their cultures, they create dances or they will make music in order for them to sustain the history of their own ethnic group.

These are endangered cultures. These cultures existed throughout history because of isolation of mountains and rivers. Freeways have been built and a lot of tourists are pouring into this part of China. More and more people come to look at these exotic cultures. Theme parks are being built and some of the ethnic artists are being brought into the theme parks to present their cultures that no one has ever seen. Is the marketing value that is hurting these cultures?

Hopefully this tour of the United States and coming to the Kennedy Center is helping to empower these artists – not only that, that they will bring this back home. Hopefully Yunnan Province and the different ethnic groups, they will appreciate what Americans have appreciated on this trip and will make a great effort in preserving these cultures."