

## Chapter One

# Chinese nationalist and socialist ideology towards Tibetan music

*There is a cultural as well as an armed front. (...) [Literature and art] can act as a powerful weapon in uniting and educating the people while attacking and annihilating the enemy – Mao Zedong Talks at the Yan'an conference on literature and art, May 1942<sup>1</sup>*

*No matter how much you read, how many stories you hear, or how many photographs you study, you can never understand Tibet – the mysterious land, you must go there yourself to smell, to breathe, to touch, to feel...– ‘Ticker tape’ caption from China Tibet Information Centre website [www.tibetinfo.com](http://www.tibetinfo.com)*

When China ‘liberated’ Tibet in 1951, Tibet became a part of the new socialist state of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Tibetans became one of the state’s ‘minority nationalities’. Tibetan music thereby became subject to the Communist Party’s strongly held views on what art should and must be, to the laws that outlined the status of the minorities of the PRC and to the mindset of the Chinese majority regarding the Tibetans and their culture. As a background to the direct and indirect effects of Chinese policy on Tibetan music, which this book describes, this chapter introduces the ideological framework of core Chinese socialist notions on music and art as propounded by Mao Zedong and later leaders, and the official and unwritten laws, principles and opinions of China regarding its minorities. This chapter refers largely to arts and literature in general and much of the discussion applies to China’s other minorities as much as to Tibetans.

## Socialism and the arts

The defining and still remarkably enduring Chinese communist statement on literature and the arts is Mao’s opening and concluding speeches on 2 and 23 May 1942 at the conference on literature and art held in Yan’an, which was first published in 1943 as *Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art*. This statement, which has its roots in Marxist-Leninist theory, expounds two fundamental concepts of what art should be and how it should be evaluated:

<sup>1</sup> Bonnie McDougall 1980 Mao Zedong’s “Talk at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art”: a translation of the 1943 text with commentary: 57-58 Center for Chinese Studies: University of Michigan.

1. There is no such thing as 'art for art's sake': all art must serve socialism and the socialist state.
2. Literature and art are from the masses, for the masses and should raise the standards of and educate the masses.

These rules and regulations on art expounded by Mao in the *Talks* have been enforced in various forms and with varying degrees of severity throughout the PRC since the Communist Party came to power in 1949, most extremely during the Cultural Revolution when the *Talks* was one of six texts that had to be studied meticulously. Despite the fact that from the 1980s China has abandoned traditional socialism for a market economy and has gradually, though unevenly, been phasing out terms such as 'counter-revolution',<sup>2</sup> the *Talks* is still often quoted as the 'correct understanding' of literature and the arts in speeches by leaders in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **There is no such thing as 'art for art's sake': all art must serve socialism or the socialist state**

*Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is an important, indeed, essential fighting front in the general revolutionary front during the revolution [...] – Mao 1940.<sup>3</sup>*

Mao was hardly the first to note the importance of culture for political mobilisation; the history of the use of art and literature for political causes is probably as old as the history of art and literature itself. The ability for art to be utilised for political causes lies in the meanings or 'messages' that it conveys. At the most obvious, there are verbal messages in literature or songs that may be as blatant as "Free Tibet! Long live the Dalai Lama!" or others that may be more metaphorical. However, music itself, without lyrics, also conveys messages that may be mobilised for political causes or that may be objected to as running against a specific political agenda and therefore subjected to censorship. These messages may be communicated through association with places, groups of people, incidents, social classes and so on at international, national, local or personal levels. For example, brass instruments and snare drums can evoke military scenes; sitars can evoke India; western orchestras can evoke grandeur, wealth and 'advanced culture' through their sheer size and complexity. In Tibet, different singing and dancing styles are distinctive of different urban and rural regions: Kham, Amdo, Kongpo, Lhasa etc. There are also conventional associations attached to music, such as in the west, the typical use of major keys for happy moods and minor keys for sad moods, or the use of certain kinds of song for certain occasions, such as weddings, births or funerals in many different cultures in the world.

<sup>2</sup> These terms are still used occasionally and have been current in Tibet for far longer since leftist ideologists remained in power over many years there. They were only revised in the law in 1997, where the crime of 'counterrevolution' became referred to as 'endangering state security'. See Steve Marshall 2002 *In the Interests of the State: Hostile Elements III – Political Imprisonment in Tibet, 1987-2001*: 9. London: Tibet Information Network.

<sup>3</sup> 'On new democracy', *Selected Works*, volume II, quoted in Perris 1985 *Music as Propaganda: Art to Persuade, Art to Control*: 96. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood.

The associations or 'messages' of music have been used, manipulated and controlled by infinite numbers of individuals, groups, and governments for a variety of different reasons and causes. Someone trying to woo a lover may play them romantic music or serenade them with a song. Advertisers pick their music with extreme care to try to ensure that they create the correct association for their product. In one-party states that do not tolerate dissent, music's messages and associations have been controlled with extreme forms of censorship so as to serve the state's ideology. In Nazi Germany, for example, jazz or jazz-influenced works were banned because they were considered 'un-Aryan' (jazz originated from African Americans). The rules for popular music were:

*Musicians were admonished to use the major key, to sing words "expressing joy in life rather than Jewishly gloomy lyrics", and to use brisk tempos not to exceed an allegro "commensurate with the Aryan sense of discipline and moderation." Strictly prohibited were the use of "instruments alien to the German spirit (so-called cowbells, flexatone, brushes, etc.), as well as all mutes which turn the noble sound of wind and brass instruments into a Jewish-Freemasonic yowl (so-called wa-wa, hat, etc.)." Plucking of the strings was also prohibited, "since it is damaging to the instrument and detrimental to Aryan musicality..."<sup>4</sup>*

In Stalinist Russia, there were astonishingly similar pressures on musicians:

*If the composers wanted their music performed, it must be simple and conspicuously melodic, and must somehow describe, or at least intimate, the happy life (or the supposition of it) in New Russia.<sup>5</sup>*

In the People's Republic of China, the class and social associations of music were the main concern of Mao, who, during the Cultural Revolution, tried to eliminate all music and other culture that was a part of the old, 'feudal' China, and which, by its existence, still kept alive 'incorrect' ways of thinking, living and relating to people and the state and even the memory of them. This level of control has not been repeated since the 1980s, but the distinctive musical features of the PRC's minorities, including the Tibetans, continue to be paraded in order to provide evidence of China's policy of protection of the minority cultures.

However, even under such extreme circumstances as seen during the Cultural Revolution in China, the scope for interpretation of music always remains finally with the individual, making it extremely difficult for the state to control the 'meaning' of music. Besides, misunderstanding or subverting the intended message cannot be ruled out. As, for example, a song in praise of Chairman Mao may fill a dissenting listener with anger or sadness rather than joy and loyalty for Mao and the Chinese state.

4 Perris 1985: 55-56, quoting from Josef Skvorecky 1979 *The Bass Saxophone*.

5 *ibid*: 74

The particular value of music and the performing arts for propaganda, as opposed to written forms, lies partly in its ability to reach illiterate people or those who do not have access to books or writing materials. With a largely poor and illiterate population like that in even today's Tibet and China, music and the performing arts have played a particularly important role. As a vehicle for dissemination, songs require nothing more than the human body and can travel fast through communities. With the help of the modern media, they can carry verbal messages to vast numbers of people across disparate communities and countries. Furthermore, their non-verbal, musical medium is able to link people together through shared experience at levels deeper than conscious thought. In all societies, the genres of music that people take part in, either as performers or listeners, help constitute their social, ethnic and religious identity, and distinguish them from other groups.<sup>6</sup> Music is therefore a powerful force in social cohesion, one of the most effective ways of enhancing and inducing a sense of belonging to a particular group or movement and something that many political leaders have been only too aware of. The renowned Russian composer Shostakovich, who himself ran into trouble with Stalin on several occasions, due to works he composed which were not deemed 'correct', quoted Lenin as saying, "*music is a means of unifying broad masses of people.*" He then continued in his own words, "[music] *is not a leader of masses, perhaps, but certainly an organising force! [...] Music is no longer an end in itself, but a vital weapon in the struggle.*" Mao similarly states in the *Talks* that the "*cultural army*" "*is indispensable in achieving unity among ourselves and winning victory over the enemy*". However, in the case of the PRC, music's "*organising force*" is available for mobilisation not just by the state, for its drive to promote national unity, but also by Tibetans to bolster a distinct Tibetan identity or to resist the state.

Equally vital in political campaigns is the emotive power of music, its ability to tap profoundly into people's feelings, passions, and energy. The impact of an epic or a romantic film, for example, is hardly imaginable without its soundtrack. Similarly, inappropriate musical accompaniment destroys the effect of a poignant section of film, theatre or opera. Although the received 'message' of a piece of music or song cannot be entirely controlled, the potential of what Mao termed the "*cultural army*" of music and the performing arts to reach out to hundreds of millions of people and inspire them to act with passion and conviction, with their hearts and minds as well as their bodies, has been widely recognised by revolutionaries and totalitarian-style regimes.<sup>8</sup>

Mao's interpretation of socialism called for an entirely new society and consciousness, based on a 'new culture', free from old associations and messages. In such an environment, music, like any art, "*must affirm the state ideology and the theory and practice of [the] socio-political programme*".<sup>9</sup> Art or literature that 'just' entertains is at best futile, and at worst, can threaten the ideological grounds that the new society

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, John Blacking's classic 1973 analysis of the relationship of music to social groups and culture *How Musical is Man?* in particular, pages 32-53.

<sup>7</sup> Rose Lee, "D. Shostakovich" in *The New York Times*, December 20, 1931, quoted in Perris 1985 *Music as Propaganda*: 67.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Vivian Wagner's paper on the importance of songs and singing to Mao's Red Guards: 'Songs of the Red Guards: Keywords set to music' [http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/resources/working\\_paper/noframe\\_10b\\_song.htm#N\\_6](http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/resources/working_paper/noframe_10b_song.htm#N_6)

<sup>9</sup> Perris 1985: 68

stands on, for instance by evoking old and ‘incorrect’ ways of life and thinking. In this framework, such material becomes ‘counterrevolutionary’, going against the correct, natural and pre-ordained progression of human society towards its final goal of communism. Hence the powerful potential of art to persuade must be closely and zealously controlled.

Although Mao acknowledged the aesthetic value of art and literature, he was primarily concerned with their role in the revolutionary process, and regarded the political meaning and impact of a given piece of art as prevalent over any other consideration. He specified that political intentions behind a given song or picture alone were meaningless if these could be misread by the targeted public. It is therefore the composer’s (or writer’s) duty to make the given piece of art or literature immune from any possible counter-revolutionary interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Upon that, even Mao’s acknowledgement of the importance of the aesthetic value of art and literature has a political angle, since, as he takes care to mention, the artistic or aesthetic quality of a piece of art is fundamental to its emotive power. He states in the *Talks* that “*Works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically*”.<sup>11</sup>

Mao’s enthusiasm for the revolutionary role of art and his insistence that it must have a didactic value, must serve the revolution and, when it is established, the socialist state, was informed by earlier nationalist and political campaigns in China that mobilised music for social and political change as well as to spread socialist theory. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chinese intellectuals began to perceive the need to modernise and adopt the technological power of the west in order to strengthen the Chinese nation. Western culture, including music, was also widely adopted, since it was seen as more advanced and ‘scientific’ than Chinese culture, and appropriate to drive the country forward, strengthening it against foreign control. As musicologist Kuo-Huang writes, “*Students were sent abroad (mostly to Japan in the beginning, later to Europe and the United States) to acquire the most advanced knowledge in science and other fields. [...] Within a few generations, the entire country (at least in the cities) was affected by these new changes. Inevitably, western culture, including music, began to take root in China*”.<sup>12</sup> As Tibet later came under Chinese rule, western music came to influence parts of Tibet’s musical culture too.

China’s drive to reinvent itself intensified in 1919 with the May Fourth Movement (Ch: Wu-si Yundong), which saw Chinese intellectuals first turn to Marxism in their search for national transformation. After Japan was granted permission to take over the German leasehold area in Shandong in the Treaty of Versailles, the anger at foreign imperialism that had been brewing came to a head with student demonstrations beginning on 4 May 1919. There ensued an intense criticism of China’s establishment and a questioning of the relevance and validity of China’s musical and other cultural traditions. There were attempts to reform and modernise traditional Chinese music through, ironically, foreign

10 That this is, in practice, impossible is discussed below in chapter 4.

11 *Talks*, McDougall 1980: 78

12 2002 ‘The Introduction of Western Music in Modern Times’: 373 in *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music. Vol.7, East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea*: 373-377.

styles, and also through 'improving' traditional styles. This sense of "*discarding the dross and selecting the essential*"<sup>13</sup> for social reform and the creation of a new order became central to Mao's ideas, and remains prominent in the progressiveness of the statements of the post-Mao leaders. The May Fourth Movement also led to the mass use of protest songs against the Japanese. In these ways, the May Fourth Movement paved the way for the far more extensive politicisation of music in the PRC, and the sense that music and the arts must be reformed if society is to progress.

Consequently, as Tibet came under Chinese rule in 1951, it was drawn into a climate that had for over half a century been seeking to transform all areas of traditional culture so as to bring about social and political change. Whilst music and other areas of culture in Tibet had certainly not been static or without outside influence prior to the 1950s, Tibetan culture suddenly became caught up in what can be described as a mature movement for cultural reform, which, by the time of the Cultural Revolution, had developed into an obsessive desire to give birth to a new order by annihilating the old in the name of 'progress'. Although the Cultural Revolution came to an end in 1976, and the call for drastic reform of the arts has died down, the state ideology of today's China retains a relentlessly 'progress'-oriented outlook and party documents and speeches by party members, constantly call for 'development' and the discarding of 'dross' in the arts.

Extracts from Mao's *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*, May 1942 (McDougall 1980)

***The role of literature and arts in the revolutionary struggle***

*There are a number of different fronts in our struggle for the national liberation of China, civil and military, or, we might say, there is a cultural as well as an armed front. Victory over the enemy depends primarily on armies with guns in their hands, but this kind of army alone is not enough. We still need a cultural army, since this kind of army is indispensable in achieving unity among ourselves and winning victory over the enemy. [...] Our meeting today is to ensure that literature and art become a component part of the whole revolutionary machinery, so they can act as a powerful weapon in uniting and educating the people while attacking and annihilating the enemy, and help the people achieve solidarity in their struggle against the enemy. [...]*

*There are three kinds of people: our enemies, our friends, and ourselves; that is, the proletariat and its vanguard. A different attitude is required for each of these three kinds of people. Should we "praise" the enemy, Japanese fascists and all other enemies of the people?<sup>14</sup> Certainly not, because they are the very worst kind of*

13 This much quoted phrase is from a speech made by Mao in a lecture at the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College in Yan'an in July 1937, entitled 'On Practice: On the Relation Between Knowledge and Practice, Between Knowing and Doing'. The full text is available on the online Mao Zedong archive [http://www.maoism.org/msw/vol1/mswv1\\_16.htm](http://www.maoism.org/msw/vol1/mswv1_16.htm).

14 The Talks refer specifically to the war with Japan, the most pressing problem of that time, but the sense of fighting the enemy is seen in later times as fighting any enemies of the state.

*reactionaries. [...] The task of our armed forces is to capture their weapons and turn them against the enemy to seize victory. The task of our cultural army is to expose the enemy's atrocities, treachery, and inevitable defeat, and to encourage anti-Japanese forces to unite in complete solidarity to win a decisive victory. ... (Pages 57-59)*

***Art for art's sake does not and should not exist***

*In the world today, all culture or literature and art belongs to a definite class and party, and has a definite political line. Art for art's sake, art that stands above class and party, and fellow-travelling or politically independent art do not exist in reality. In a society composed of classes and parties, art obeys both class and party and it must naturally obey the political demands of its class and party, and the revolutionary task of a given revolutionary age; any deviation is a deviation from the masses' basic need. Proletarian literature and art are a part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; as Lenin said, they are "a screw in the whole machine", and therefore, the party's work in literature and art occupies a definite, assigned position within the party's revolutionary work as a whole. [...] We do not support excessive emphasis on the importance of literature and art, nor do we support their underestimation. Literature and art are subordinate to politics, and yet in turn exert enormous influence on it. Revolutionary literature and art are a part of the whole work of revolution; they are a screw, which of course doesn't compare with other parts in importance, urgency, or priority, but which is nevertheless indispensable in the whole machinery, an indispensable part of revolutionary work as a whole. If literature and art did not exist in even the broadest and most general sense, the revolution could not advance or win victory; it would be incorrect not to acknowledge this. [...] Ideological warfare and literary and artistic warfare, especially if these wars are revolutionary, are necessarily subservient to political warfare, because class and mass needs can only be expressed in a concentrated form through politics. (Page 75)*

***On the political content of art and literature as the fundamental criteria for its evaluation***

*There are two criteria in literary criticism, the political and the artistic. According to the political criterion, everything that is in the interests of unity in the War of Resistance, encourages solidarity among the masses, opposes retreat and promotes progress is good or better, while everything that is not in the interests of unity in the War of Resistance, encourages a lack of solidarity among the masses, opposes progress or drags people backwards is bad or worse. [...] Neither are effects that don't win the approval of the masses or aren't in their interests despite a motive to serve them. In examining a writer's subjective desires, whether his motives are correct and upright,*

*we don't go by his declarations but rather by the effect that his actions (his words) produce among the masses in society. [...] Our criticism still takes a firm stand on principle, and we must pass strict judgement on works of literature and art that contain antinational, antiscientific, antimass and antiparty views, because these kinds of so-called literature and art, both in motive and effect, damage unity in the War of Resistance. According to the artistic criterion, all works of higher artistic standards are good or better, while those of lower artistic standards are bad or worse; but even in making this distinction we must naturally consider social effect. [...] There are some things which are fundamentally reactionary in political terms, and yet can have a certain artistry, for example, fascist literature and art. Insofar as a work is reactionary, the more artistic it is the more harm it can do to the people and the more it should be rejected. The common characteristic of all literature and art of exploiting classes in their period of decline is the contradiction between their reactionary political content and their artistic form. What we demand, therefore, is a unity of politics and art, a unity of content and form, a unity of revolutionary political content and the highest artistic form possible. Works of art that lack artistry, however progressive politically, are nevertheless ineffectual. (Pages 77-78)*

## **Literature and art are from the masses, for the masses, and should raise the standards of and educate the masses**

That literature and art belong ultimately to the masses and should be for the masses is one of the strongest points made by Mao in the *Talks*. Art, which caters to elite or bourgeois groups, is in conflict with the fundamental goal of establishing rule by the proletariat and ownership of all resources by the proletariat in a classless society. Mao refers to Lenin on this point, who had already expounded these views, stating, “*art belongs to the people*”.<sup>15</sup> In another article he wrote with considerable venom that Party literature “*will be a free literature, because it will serve not some satiated heroine, not the bored ‘upper ten thousand’ suffering from fatty degeneration, but the millions and tens of millions of working people – the flower of the country, its strength and future. [...]*”<sup>16</sup>

This idea has endured in Chinese Communist Party statements on art and literature and is manifested in a range of state-sponsored musical and cultural activities such as the dance troupes and the vast-scale official celebrations, involving thousands of musicians and dancers. In a concise illustration of the logic behind socialist cultural, economic and development policy, Mao states in the *Talks*: “*Nothing can be considered good unless a large number of people benefit greatly from it*”.<sup>17</sup>

Another far-reaching manifestation of the ‘music of and for the masses’ approach of the Chinese Communist Party is the use of folk songs in modern compositions such as the revolutionary operas of the Cultural Revolution. Mao urged artists and writers to “*go amongst the masses*” in search of material for their work. This has inspired an immense

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Perris 1985: 69

<sup>16</sup> Lenin Collected Works X: 48-49

<sup>17</sup> McDougall 1980: 74



amount of research into and documentation of folk traditions in the PRC including those of its minorities, such as the Tibetans.

Like the use of music for social change and political campaigns, the interest in folk songs as 'authentic' Chinese culture started with the nationalist campaigns of late 19th and early 20th century China and the May fourth movement. "*Folk song was celebrated as a true expression of the Chinese people and a foundation for a new national culture*".<sup>18</sup> In 1918, a 'folk song campaign' was started at Peking University, and a journal, *Folk Song Weekly*, was published, which printed folk song texts.

At the same time, the large ensembles of western music exerted a certain fascination on those who wanted to reach large numbers of people. In 1903, an article was published by Fei Shi entitled 'On the Reform of (Chinese) Music' which called for "*the establishment of a new national music that would allow the participation of a large number of people so that a sense of solidarity could be stimulated among them*".<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most important aspect of the 'music of the masses' ideas, and the one with the most important implications for minorities like the Tibetans, is the sense that the literature and art of the masses must be 'developed' and 'improved'. This also ties in with the nationalist and socialist calls for cultural progress and transformation for nationalist and revolutionary purposes. Mao's *Talks*, and subsequent official statements, call for the 'raising of standards' in order that the 'masses' may be 'better served'. This has been implemented in a number of ways that are explored in this book, but raises important questions about cultural autonomy in the case where the Han-dominated state makes these pronouncements on Tibetan or other minority music and implements significant change in the musical cultures of these non-Han ethnic groups. This raises in the first place the question as to who has the legitimacy to decide that culture should be 'improved', and in which context existing culture appears somehow inadequate for the people who create it. Whilst romanticising the music of the masses, including the minorities, this sense of 'helping the masses/minorities develop' in fact takes the right and authority of cultural production out of their hands. The 'music of the masses' is seen as the raw material for true art, not true art itself. The paternalism of this perception is doubled in the case of minority culture, which is anyway seen as unsophisticated and, at least implicitly, inferior to Han culture and hence in need of 'development'. These ideas that culture should be 'developed' and that the Tibetans need 'help' to 'develop' their culture is a recurrent leit-motif of party speeches and documents from the 1950s to the present day.

18 Su Zheng 2002 'Chinese Scholarship and Historical Source Materials: Twentieth Century': 139-140 in The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music. Vol.7, East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea: 135-145.

19 Wong 2002: 379

Extracts from Mao's *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*, May 1942 (McDougall 1980)

***Literature and art are from the masses, for the masses, and should raise the standards of and educate the masses***

*Rich deposits of literature and art actually exist in popular life itself: they are things in their natural forms, crude but also extremely lively, rich, and fundamental; they make all processed forms of literature pale in comparison, they are the sole and inexhaustible source of processed forms of literature and art. [...] Revolutionary Chinese writers and artists, the kind from whom we expect great things, must go among the masses; they must go among the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers and into the heat of battle for a long time to come, without reservation, devoting body and soul to the task ahead; they must go to the sole, the broadest, and the richest source, to observe, experience, study, and analyse all the different kinds of people, all the classes and all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, and all literature and art in their natural form, before they are ready for the stage of processing or creating, where you integrate raw materials with production, the stage of study with the stage of creation. (69-70)*

*Our professional musicians should give their attention to songs sung by the masses. Our professional artists should give their attention to mass art. All of these comrades should develop wider close relationships with comrades who are doing the work of reaching wider audiences on the lowest level among the masses, helping and guiding them at the same time as learning from them and drawing sustenance from them, replenishing, enriching, and nourishing themselves so that their profession does not become an ivory tower isolated from the masses and from reality, devoid of meaning and vitality. (73)*

*What are we trying to reach [the masses] with? Feudal things? Bourgeois things? Petty bourgeois things? None of these things will do: we must use what belongs to workers, peasants, and soldiers themselves, and therefore, the task of learning from workers, peasants, and soldiers comes before the task of educating them. [...] We must raise standards on the basis of workers, peasants, and soldiers, on the basis of their present cultural level and their budding literature and art. [...] Only by starting from workers, peasants, and soldiers can we gain a correct understanding of what it means to reach a wider audience and to raise standards [...]. (68-69)*

*Although literature and art in their natural form are the sole source of literature and art in conceptualised form, and although the former is incomparably more vivid and interesting, nevertheless, people are still not satisfied with the former and demand the latter; why is this? It is because while both are beautiful, literature and art that have been processed are more organised and concentrated than literature and art in*

*their natural form; they are more typical and more idealised, and therefore have greater universality. (70)*

*To sum up, the raw material of literature and art in popular life undergoes processing by revolutionary writers to become literature and art in conceptual form, which serve the popular masses; they include both an advanced mass literature and art, developed on the basis of lower-grade mass literature and art and serving the needs of the masses whose standards have been raised, primarily mass cadres, as well as a lower-grade mass literature and art, which in their turn come under the guidance of advanced mass literature and art and serve the primary needs of the broad masses today (which isn't to say literature and art with low standards of taste). Whether at a high level or a low one, our literature and art serve the popular masses, primarily workers, peasants, and soldiers; they are created for workers, peasants, and soldiers, and are used by them. (70-71)*

## One of the minorities of the PRC

### National cultural autonomy and equality: the 17-Point Agreement, the Constitution and the Law on Regional National Autonomy

Tibet was made part of the PRC on 23 May 1951 with the signing of the 17-Point Agreement.<sup>20</sup> This document set out the framework for Tibetan autonomy within the larger structure of the PRC. It states that Tibetans are one of the nationalities of the PRC, all of which are equal and have the right to live according to their own traditions and practice their own culture, as long as this does not jeopardise the unity of the PRC as a whole. This echoes the statements made in nationalist government and PRC constitutions throughout the 20th century. During the Guomintang's Republic of China, "constitutional compacts had been adopted in 1912, 1914, 1923 and 1931 which enshrined the principle of equality for all nationalities before the law",<sup>21</sup> and the constitutions implemented by the Communist Party in 1954, 1975, 1978 and 1982 have all confirmed the principle of autonomy within the PRC for 'national minorities'. Article 4 of the current Constitution of 1982 states:

*All nationalities in the People's Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality*

20 See <http://www.tibetinfo.net/publications/docs/spa.htm> for the full text of the 17-Point Agreement. See also TIN Special Report 21 May 2001 'A turning point in Tibet's history: The 17-Point Agreement' <http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/nu210501.htm> and TIN News Update 3 May 2001 "An important political responsibility": Anniversary of 17-Point Agreement in Tibet' <http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/nu030501.htm>. For further reading see Tsering Shakya (1999) *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* and Melvyn Goldstein (1989) *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*.

21 Mackerras 1991 *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century*: 61

*are prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited. The state helps the areas inhabited by minority nationalities speed up their economic and cultural development in accordance with the peculiarities and needs of the different minority nationalities. Regional autonomy is practised in areas where people of minority nationalities live in compact communities; in these areas organs of self-government are established for the exercise of the right of autonomy. All the national autonomous areas are inalienable parts of the People's Republic of China. The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs.*<sup>22</sup>

The Law on Regional National Autonomy of 1984 lays down in further detail the autonomy of the nationalities and develops some of the principles, such as the right of nationalities to use their own language, to receive broadcasts in that language and so on.<sup>23</sup>

Despite this apparent commitment to establishing and protecting minority national autonomy and equality in the 17-Point Agreement, the constitutions and the Law on Regional National Autonomy, parts of the very wording in these documents hint at problems and contradictions. The metaphor used in the 17-Point Agreement is that the different nationalities of the PRC form a 'big, happy family'. This metaphor is repeated frequently in statements by Chinese officials, scholars and individuals, and is central to the extensive amounts of propaganda using and reporting on musical culture and performance. However, the metaphor also illustrates the implausibility of the statement that all the nationalities of the PRC, including the Chinese themselves (Han), which form 91.6% of China's total population,<sup>24</sup> can truly be equal, since family relationships are always to some degree hierarchical. Other official statements refer more realistically to the Tibetans (and other minorities) as 'children' or 'younger brothers' of the Han.

The constitutions and the law on regional national autonomy also strongly outlaw Han chauvinism, 'big-nation chauvinism', which has long been recognised by Chinese leaders as a threat to national unity.<sup>25</sup> However, the ban on what is termed "*local national chauvinism*" is given equal emphasis to "*big national chauvinism*". Although not defined in either document, "*local national chauvinism*" refers to fear that a the implementation

22 See <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html> for the full text of the 1982 constitution of the PRC.

23 The full text of this law is available on the Tibet Justice Centre website on <http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/china/china6.html>.

24 William Lavelly (2001) 'First Impressions of the 2000 Census of China': 7, <http://csde.washington.edu/pubs/wps/01-13.pdf>. For an analysis of the Tibetan population of the PRC according to the 2000 census see TIN News Update 30 September 2003 'Overview of the Tibetan Population in the PRC in the 2000 census' <http://www.tibetinfo.co.uk/news-updates/2003/3009.htm>.

25 In an inner-party directive was drafted by Mao for the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on 16 March 1953 entitled "Criticise Han Chauvinism" (see [http://www.maoism.org/msw/vol5/mswv5\\_25.htm](http://www.maoism.org/msw/vol5/mswv5_25.htm), from the online library of works of Mao Zedong from the Maoist documentation project). Mao again attacked Han chauvinism in his speeches at the National Conference of the Communist Part of China, March 21 1955, where he argued that the minority nationals must be given respect equal to the Han, since their existence is essential to the PRC: "Who is it that inhabits 50 to 60 per cent of our territory, the Han or the other nationalities? The minority nationalities. Rich resources and hidden wealth abound in these areas" (see [http://www.maoism.org/msw/vol5/mswv5\\_41.htm](http://www.maoism.org/msw/vol5/mswv5_41.htm)).

of a given minority's autonomy might overshadow the sense of homogeneity of the nation as a whole, and that in the process a minority nationality of the PRC might effectively become a separate nationality. The 17-Point Agreement states: "*The Central People's Government will assist all national minorities to develop their political, economic, cultural and educational construction work*". But the concept of the role of a (Han-dominated) state in 'developing' Tibetan culture appears in direct contradiction to the principle of autonomy. The constitution phrases the concept of 'development of minority culture' far more carefully, as does the Law on Regional National Autonomy, putting nominal development of a nationality culture more in the hands of that minority nationality itself. However, whatever the exact wording, the paternalistic nature of a (Han-dominated) state helping to develop minority culture comes across strongly in many official statements, propaganda and research.

The need to develop minority national culture that is distinctive, but not so distinctive as to hint at an entirely separate identity, is at the heart of much of the policy that continues to lead music and other aspects of Tibetan culture in new directions, and to present it from the point of view of what is a vastly Han-dominated mainland. The concept itself of minority national autonomy is therefore flawed.

## Paternalism

Although the 17-Point Agreement, and many other official statements, present the nationalities of the PRC as equal members of one family, other statements indicate something closer to the actual power relations, that of the Tibetans as younger brothers or even children. In a landmark speech to the Tibetans in 1980, the then Secretary-General of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Hu Yaobang apologised to the Tibetans for the devastation of the Cultural Revolution and marked the way for a considerable increase in the actual autonomy the Tibetans had over their culture and administration. He spoke of the "*brotherly love*" of Han and Tibetan PLA members, and commented that both Chinese and Tibetan cadres had made mistakes. However, he said of the Tibetans:

*I think that for the most part we cannot blame them. For the most part it is our responsibility, because we are the teachers, the elder brothers.*

The relationship of the Chinese to the Tibetans is reminiscent of the relationship between the leadership and the masses: both have been 'liberated' by the socialist revolution, and both are regarded as needing to be developed and to have their cultural standards raised. In the Talks, Mao quotes and offers an interpretation of a couplet by the influential 20th Century writer Lu Xun:

*Stern browed I coolly face the fingers of a thousand men,  
Head bowed I'm glad to be an ox for little children*

[This] *should become our motto. The “thousand men” are the enemy, we will never submit to any enemy no matter how ferocious. The “children” are the proletariat and the popular masses.*<sup>26</sup>

The paternalistic attitude towards the minorities is channelled through and supported by an evolutionary view of human development expounded in the writings of Morgan and Engels, which is shared by the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>27</sup> This model ultimately predicts the “*withering away of class and national identity*”.<sup>28</sup> This evolutionary framework has long been abandoned by western anthropologists, and is beginning to be criticised by Chinese scholars,<sup>29</sup> however, it still prevails in academic work, as well as in the mindset of the Chinese public, and in practice guides the minorities policy of the PRC, despite the principles laid out in the constitutions. As recently as 1989, for instance, Fei Xiaotong explained in a lecture given in Hong Kong:

*But as the national minorities generally are inferior to the Han in the level of culture and technology indispensable for the development of modern industry, they would find it difficult to undertake industrial projects in their own regions, their advantage of natural resources notwithstanding. (...) Therefore, our principle is for the better-developed groups to help the underdeveloped ones by furnishing economic and cultural aids.*<sup>30</sup>

Thus according to this framework China’s minorities are seen as being at a lower developmental level than the Chinese. They may be seen as ‘living fossils’ of the earlier stages of development that the Han have long since transcended, as proved by various backward customs, an example of which, in the case of the Tibetans, is the practice of polyandry.

However, the sense that the non-Chinese peoples are inferior, backward and barbaric is something that long predates Morgan and Engels’ writing. The traditional Chinese view of these ethnic groups is that they are backward, but still can “*become civilised through education and immersion in Chinese culture*”.<sup>31</sup> The evolutionary theory of Morgan and Engels, therefore, served to give old ideas authority in the modern world, to thinly disguise what is essentially Han chauvinism with a supposedly scientific discourse.<sup>32</sup>

Although the constitutions of the PRC, as well as official statements on the equality of the nationalities and warnings against Han Chauvinism, do protect minorities, such as

26 McDougall 1980: 85

27 See Helen Rees 2000, *Echoes of History: Nazi Music in Modern China*: 17-18 and 2002 ‘Music of China’s national minorities’ in *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music. Vol. 7, East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea*: 440. See also Dru Gladney 1994 ‘Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority Minority Identities’: 99-103.

28 Gladney 1994: 100-101

29 Such as Tong Enzheng, a Sichuanese anthropologist and musicologist, quoted in Gladney 1994: 100

30 Quoted in Gladney 1994: 100

31 Rees 2000: 13-14. Many people have written on this subject. See, for example Heberer 2001, ‘Old Tibet a Hell on Earth? The Myth of Tibet and Tibetans in Chinese Art and Propaganda’: 113-121 in Dodin and Raether (eds.) *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*; Meserve and Meserve 1979, ‘Theatre for Assimilation: China’s National Minorities’: 95-104, in *Journal of Asian History* Vol. 13:95-120/

32 This is exactly the same as the way Darwin’s theories of evolution helped 19th Century Europe categorise some non-European cultures as ‘primitive’ ‘authoritatively’.

the Tibetans, from being described as barbarians in official discourse, the terms 'backward' or 'crude' are still not uncommon, and the sense that the (Han) state must help the minorities develop their culture, which implies that it is somehow backward or inadequate, is ubiquitous and standard in official documents and speeches. The section from the 17-Point Agreement has been quoted above. More recently, in 1997, the then TAR Party Secretary Chen Kuiyuan pointed out the improvements to Tibetan culture as a result of the contact with the Chinese in a hard-hitting speech on art and literature:

*Since the peaceful liberation of Tibet, its cultural undertakings, including literary and artistic creation, the fine arts, the science of history, Tibet research, the press, publishing, film, television, and literature and art in the region all have made unprecedented developments. (...) There is a world of difference between today's Tibet and the old Tibet, where culture was desolate, there was only a scattering of talent, and society was destitute.<sup>33</sup>*

### **Exoticism: the singing and dancing minorities of the PRC**

The traditional Chinese view of the Tibetans and other minorities as backward and barbarian illustrates typically ethnocentric attitudes, that is, those that "*favour one's own group and marginalize neighbouring peoples*".<sup>34</sup> Such attitudes have a long history and considerable contemporary influence in China:

*Because Chinese central power and culture have continued for two thousand years, traditional ethnocentric notions dominate the pattern of behaviour toward non-Han people and the expectations of how they should behave toward the central power. Imperial China understood itself as the cultural centre of the world and its culture as the culture of all humanity.<sup>35</sup>*

However, it must be emphasised that ethnocentricity is by no means exclusive to Han Chinese, and is a feature of most societies in the world.<sup>36</sup> In ethnocentric viewpoints, in defining one's own group as the centre and as normal, those outside or on the peripheries of the group tend to be seen in derogatory terms such as backward, barbarian, uncivilised, deviant and uncultivated or wild (according to the group's own standards), and/or in terms that admire them as being 'different' in the sense of exciting, unusual, mysterious, fascinating, exotic, erotic and colourful.<sup>37</sup>

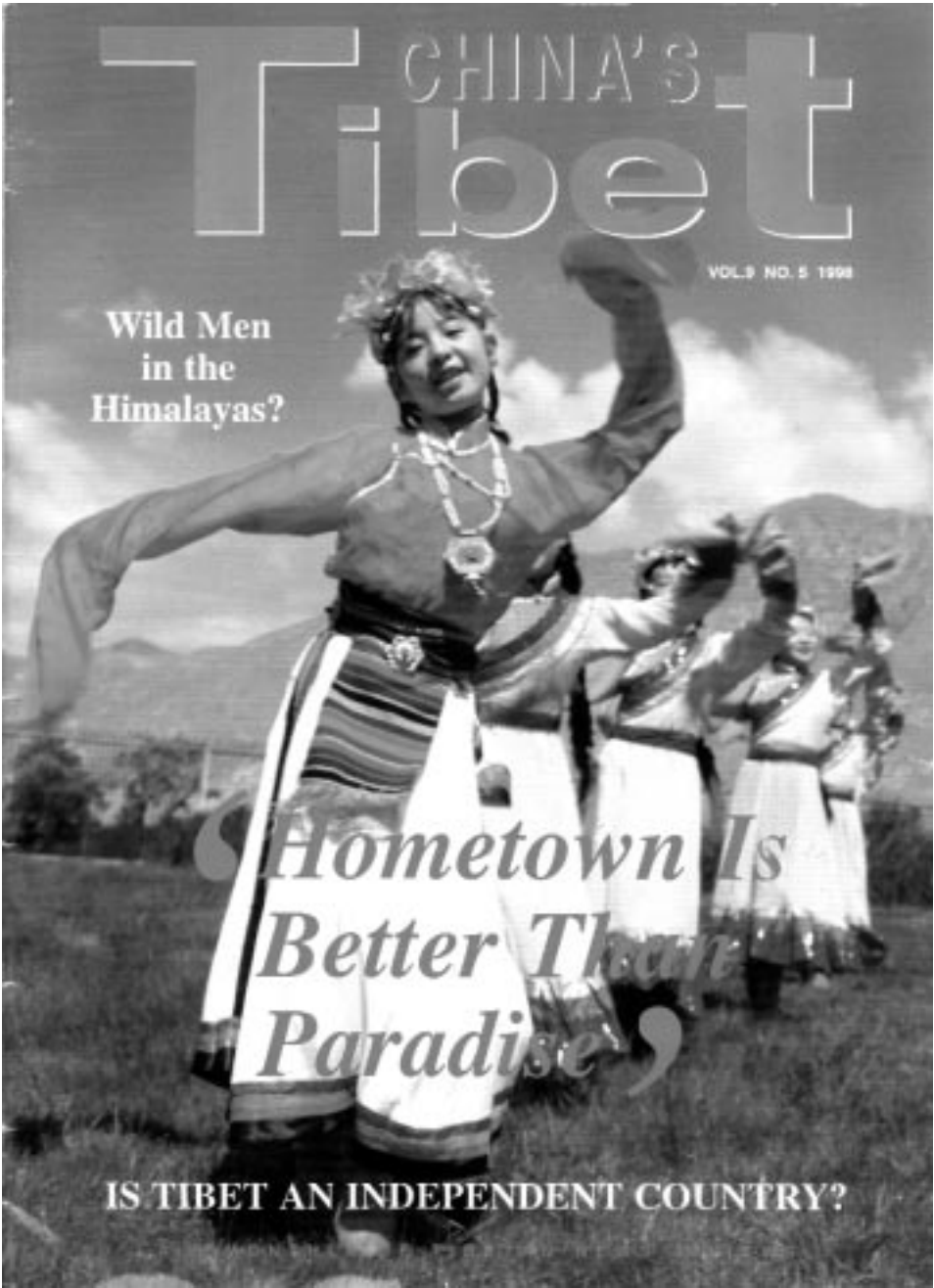
33 Xizang Ribao, Lhasa, in Chinese 16 July 97, SWB AS1 AsPol mk.

34 Heberer 2001: 113

35 *ibid*

36 *ibid*: 113. This section discusses the ethnocentricity of the Chinese view of Tibetans – the western view of Tibet as a Shangri-la is equally ethnocentric, idealising Tibet as everything the west is not, see Dodin and Raether (eds.) 2001 *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*, for a range of articles examining such attitudes to Tibet and Tibetans by Westerners and Chinese. See also Jamyang Norbu 1998 'Dances with Yaks: Tibet in Film, Fiction and Fantasy of the West' in *Tibetan Review* January 1998: 18-23.

37 See Heberer 2001 for a historical analysis of these attitudes in the PRC and their manifestation in art and propaganda.



Cover of China's Tibet 1998 volume 9 no. 5



The reference to Tibetans and other nationalities in insulting terms such as ‘backward’ or ‘barbarian’ has been strongly attacked in official statements by Mao<sup>38</sup> and also in the constitutions of the PRC and the law on national minorities of 1984, which outlaw “*big nation chauvinism*”, i.e. Han Chauvinism (see above). This has resulted in the reduction of the public and official use of such depictions of the minorities in propaganda and the media. However, the Tibetans have by no means escaped the Chinese ethnocentric viewpoint.

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976<sup>39</sup> and the opening up and liberalising climate of the 1980s, there has been a powerful move in favour of creativity and diversity in culture in the PRC as a whole. Whilst the ten years of the Cultural Revolution saw music and the performing arts reduced to eight revolutionary operas and revolutionary songs imposed on all the diverse peoples of the PRC, the reaction to this widely denounced ‘decade of madness’ has been a celebration of unity in diversity and an embracing of the different nationalities of the PRC (the ‘happy family’) and acknowledgement and encouragement of the ‘national characteristics’ of their art, music, drama, dance, literature, clothing and so on. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter four in the context of propaganda, with accusations made against the Chinese authorities of ‘assimilating’ the minority nationalities, or in the case of Tibet, as having ‘destroyed Tibetan culture’, there is a need for the authorities to give ‘proof’ of flourishing minority cultures, which comes in the form of endless images of Tibetans and other minorities singing and dancing in colourful traditional costumes.

The apparent total ‘U-turn’ on policy towards culture and the arts, particularly that of the Tibetans and other minorities, following the Cultural Revolution has brought about a real cultural renaissance. It has also meant that the Tibetans and other minorities are more likely to be described in terms of admiration and fascination for their culture than labelled as ‘barbarians’ – the other extreme of the ethnocentric viewpoint. However, although not directly insulting, this new image still depicts the Tibetans from the point of view of the Han and serves the purpose of the state. Their ‘colour’ and love of singing and dancing is certainly not empowering in political terms, suggesting rather that they are frivolous. In a subtle fashion, this new image brings us back to the paternalistic role of the PRC in relation to the minorities: the Tibetans and other minorities are the carefree and enchanting ‘children’ of the state, who may ‘play’ at singing, dancing and dressing up, while serious business such as the wielding of real power and the shaping of people’s futures is undertaken by the Chinese controlled authorities.

Although the post-Cultural Revolution enthusiasm for minority culture has helped the preservation and propagation of Tibetan culture and has encouraged unprecedented,

38 See for example an inner Party directive of 16 March 1953, ‘Criticism Han Chauvinism’. The full text is available on the online Mao Zedong archive on [http://www.maoism.org/msw/vol5/mswv5\\_25.htm](http://www.maoism.org/msw/vol5/mswv5_25.htm).

39 Strictly speaking, the Cultural Revolution lasted from 1966-1969, but the chaos and extreme censorship initiated by the political campaigns of 1966-1969 remained until Mao’s death, hence the entire period may, for simplicity, be referred to as the Cultural Revolution.

though sometimes controversial, interest in Tibetan culture from mainland Chinese,<sup>40</sup> it has also served to de-politicise the existence of Tibet as a part of the PRC. Furthermore, the de-politicised image of Tibetans is still often mixed with negative undertones, albeit not as blatant as the old-fashioned label of 'barbarian'. This mixture of admiration, erotic fascination and yet disapproval by the Han (politicians and non-politicians) towards the national minorities, plus the sense that the minorities are irrelevant to serious politics, is perfectly encapsulated in a statement from a Han taxi driver made to the American academic Dru Gladney before the 1991 Chinese New Year's Spring Festival:

*I try to stay clear of politics. On New Year's Eve, I'm not going to light fireworks like everyone else, and that's how I'll show that I don't support the government. If I don't set off fireworks, all my neighbours will know that I don't give a damn about this country. I'm just going to sit at home and watch the special New Year's programme on TV. They'll have a lot of acrobats, singers, comedians, and minority dances. Those minorities sure can sing and dance. (...) I really like to watch those minority girls, they're a lot "looser" (suibian) than our Han women. They bathe naked in the rivers and wear less clothing. Our women wouldn't act that way. (...) Some of my friends have even gone down to Yunnan (...), or was it Guizhou? (...) to see if they could meet some minority girls, they are very casual, you know. Han women aren't free like that. It's frustrating. Just like our politics, we can't do anything about it (mei banfa). So why try?<sup>41</sup>*

40 The late 1990s saw a 'Tibet craze' in the PRC, as Chinese became fascinated with Tibetan ethnic and spiritual culture. One of the products of this craze was the music album *Sister Drum*, by 'Dadawa', an ethnic Chinese singer, Zhu Zhequin, who had adopted a Tibetan image for the album. The album caused a storm of protest by exile Tibetans who saw it as cultural appropriation and as presenting a demeaning image of Tibetans. See Janet Upton 2002 'The Politics and Poetics of *Sister Drum*: "Tibetan" Music in the Global Marketplace'.

41 Quoted in Gladney 1994, 'Representing nationality in China: Refiguring majority/minority identities': 92