

Chapter Four

The voice of the state: Musical propaganda in Tibet

Tibetan herdsmen have flown over several ages in the short period of a fortnight, and, singing and dancing, have now reached heaven in one stride, taking them into People's Communes in which are carried the seeds of communism. – Xie Chanju, First Secretary, CCP Committee, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Zhou, 6 November 1959

Since its earliest days, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has harnessed the potential power of music to persuade, unite and mobilise large numbers of people. After the 'liberation' of Tibet in 1951, the Party's 'revolutionary folksongs' (Ch: *geming gequ*; Tib: *mang lu*) were introduced into Tibet in thousands, being taught directly to Tibetans, and with the aid of loudspeakers and later radio, disseminated over virtually every corner of the Tibetan areas. Reformed musical dramas and modern (spoken) drama were also used widely to pound out the Party line, whether in live performance by touring troupes or in film versions. This crude use of music and drama as vehicles for political slogans and manifestos has greatly diminished since the end of the Cultural Revolution, but has by no means disappeared entirely; propaganda songs are still taught in schools and performed at political festivals. Other less direct and more subtle forms of propaganda continue to use music either to convey the Party line or legitimise Party ideology and Chinese rule, or control Tibetan culture. This chapter explores the ways in which the Party conveys its messages and asserts its worldview directly or indirectly through music and song lyrics, and the presentation of Tibetan music and musical performances in the official media and speeches. It will also address the question of the effectiveness of these forms of propaganda.

Music as a Party mouthpiece

Revolutionary songs

From its inception in 1921, music played a central role in the Chinese Communist Party's struggle to come to power. In 1924, Mao Zedong included singing sessions in a 13-week seminar he held in Guangzhou about the organisation of a peasant movement and, in 1926, the CCP published a songbook called *Geming ge ji* ('Collection of Songs for the Revolution').¹ As discussed in Chapter 1, the CCP's use of music and the arts for propaganda was codified in 1942 in Mao's *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*, which led to a further intensification of the production of 'revolutionary

¹ Isabel Wong 1984 'Geming Gequ: Songs for the Education of the Masses': 120-121. In McDougall (ed) (1984) *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979*. Berkely: University of California Press.

folksongs', some based on tunes newly composed in Yan'an and others on folk tunes collected by cadres from the surrounding countryside. The CCP's use of mass singing as a means of disseminating their political agenda and uniting large numbers of people itself had precedents in the form of earlier protest singing movements. During the Republican era, didactic nationalist songs were taught in schools as a part of the curriculum set by the Republican government from 1911, which in turn was influenced by the congregational singing of missionary movements in the late 19th century.

Until the end of the Cultural Revolution, the CCP's political campaigns across the People's Republic of China (PRC) were substantially fuelled by the intense emotion and energy generated through mass singing. These 'revolutionary folksongs' were presented by the Party as the spontaneous outpouring of the people's hearts. However, the vast majority of them were created by the Party or under the influence of the Party, although many used the tunes of traditional folksongs with new lyrics. Lobsang Dekyi, who grew up in an aristocratic family in Shigatse in the 50s and 60s, explained:

These songs were [the Chinese communists'] own creations, composed with music and with political meanings and all, but when performing these songs, while inaugurating schools in China or while organising ceremonies, they would say that they were performing Tibetan folksongs. ²

These revolutionary songs were taught in schools and political meetings, and loudspeakers and radios disseminated recorded versions across virtually every inch of the PRC. They were and still are widely available in printed books of song lyrics. Lobsang Dekyi recalled how she and other aristocratic children were taught these revolutionary songs by Chinese cadres in the early years of the Chinese military presence in Tibet. This was a means of imparting socialist ideology into the children and also a means of teaching them Chinese, with most songs being taught in Chinese and simultaneously translated into Tibetan. These teaching sessions were also aimed at winning the loyalty of the Tibetans and were made pleasant occasions with



Cover of book of revolutionary songs published for Mao's anniversary

picnics, food, and gifts of money, *achor* (the coloured threads that Tibetan women weave into their hair) and soap. The song genres traditionally performed by the aristocrats such as *Nangma* and *Toeshay* also formed a part of these meetings until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, which further helped make the context for political indoctrination seem natural and comfortable. Lobsang Dekyi explained:

We were 28 to 30 children from aristocratic families and [at the first arrival of the Chinese] we were told to come to a place where we were treated with food and we were taught songs. [The Chinese] were very nice to us and explained [...] what would happen with Tibet because of the peaceful liberation of Tibet.

When the Chinese Preparatory Committee was established, they gave coins to [...] the people and then they made us, the children from the aristocratic families, perform songs, and they gave food while also teaching us songs. This was the start of the relationship that the Chinese were building up between themselves and the Tibetan people. [...] Their aim was to promote Mao [...] [At the meetings] we would sing whatever [the Chinese] suggested us to sing.³ We had this every Sunday. We had to reach there at nine in the morning and then it would continue until five in the afternoon. After that they would offer us dinner and tea and they also would give us presents.

Most of the songs we sang in Chinese because they wanted to draw our interest towards Chinese language and therefore they would sing the songs in Chinese to us first then we had to rehearse them. [...] The music teacher was a Chinese and the translator was [a Tibetan] who had graduated from China. [For example], in Chinese language, [the song] goes like this Dong tang hong tai yang sheng and then the translator would sing the translation, Shar chog nay nyima shar ['The Sun Rises in the East']. We were taught the songs both in Tibetan and Chinese.

They taught us songs that were aimed to be a means to influence us. [...] The songs propagated the Chinese policy in the minds of the Tibetan people. [...] [In] the song called Xia di jue xing, ['Be Determined to Give Up Your Life', a quote from Mao] [...] there were eight sentences that the Chinese considered so important that they wrote them both in Chinese and Tibetan and in this way promoted their aims. When Tibet was invaded, songs became so important [for the Chinese] that the Chinese sang and let the translators translate them into Tibetan. They wanted to let these songs enter into the Tibetan people's minds and then the goal was that the minds of the people would change from the old to the new.⁴

3 This included traditional Tibetan songs not of a political nature like *Nangma* and *Toeshay*

4 TIN interview TIN 03-316, 29 July 2003

After the democratic reforms took place in 1959 in what later became the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), the political campaigns intensified, culminating in the ten years of political frenzy known as the Cultural Revolution which began in earnest in 1966. During the Cultural Revolution, the only music that was permitted was revolutionary folksongs and the eight 'model' revolutionary operas. Lobsang Dekyi described how after the reforms "*the meetings were getting stricter and stricter*":

The people were made to torment the aristocrats and they were made to beat drums and play cymbals [Tib: bujo] while they were singing songs like 'Socialism is Good, Socialism is Good, the Socialist Nation Develops its People'⁵ [...] When the reforms took place [after 1959], the songs were made in order to change the old into the new. First, we had meetings and we had to memorise the book of Mao, which contained eight points and we had to say "it is not allowed to take even a needle or a string from the people [or] to speak in honorific language, it is not allowed to use violence, it is not allowed to oppress the people", and then we had to sing 'The Sun Rises in the East'. The songs were taught in schools particularly and the children had to do some body-exercises in the morning while the songs were being played over loudspeakers.⁶

Lobsang Dekyi described the songs of the pre-Cultural Revolution and Cultural Revolution era as "*really 'heavy' in their meaning and capable of having a powerful impact on the culture of Tibet*".⁷ Few areas in the PRC were left untouched by revolutionary songs by the time of the Cultural Revolution.

Although political songs have become less common since the end of the Cultural Revolution, they are still taught in schools and in dance troupes and are performed during political festivals such as National Day (1 October) and disseminated by television and radio.⁸ The three-year patriotic education campaign launched in September 1994 instituted regular flag raising and national anthem singing ceremonies in schools across the TAR. The *People's Daily* reported on 15 September 1994: "*Every Monday morning, the brightly coloured five-star red flag is raised at all primary and secondary schools in Lhasa and the singing of the national anthem can be heard all over the city*".⁹ Prisoners have been made to sing the national anthem and songs like 'Socialism is Good', which has led to protests (see below). There was also an attempt by the authorities to take advantage of the karaoke craze, which reached

5 See section below for the full text of this song

6 *ibid*

7 *ibid*

8 Following the end of the Cultural Revolution, the drive for a revolution was discredited and terms like 'revolutionary folksong' or 'counter-revolutionary propaganda' gradually went out of use. The modern equivalent of the 'revolutionary folksongs' are now known as 'propaganda songs' (Ch: *xuanchuan gequ*; Tib: *mang lu* 'the people's songs' or *toeshay* 'praise songs'). In Tibet, where leftists were in control for longer, these terms were still used into the 1980s, and in some cases in the 1990s.

9 'Tibet's Education in Patriotism Varied and Interesting', *Renmin Ribao*, Beijing, in Chinese 15 Sep 1994, full text available on *World Tibet Network* news archive 3 October 2003 <http://www.tibet.ca/english/index.html>.

Tibet in the mid-1980s, by commissioning recordings of political songs for karaoke.¹⁰ Figure 1. These songs attempt to indoctrinate people, win loyalty and project an image of success through a mixture of vocal and musical messages, carried by the music itself and the manner of its performance. However, although the Party propagates its messages in these ways, whether the messages are actually received and understood, let alone accepted, by Tibetans is another question entirely, and is discussed later in this chapter.



Figure 1: Karaoke cassette with some of Tsetan Dolma’s famous propaganda songs

The document of The Conference on the Work of External Propaganda on the Question of Tibet, 10 March 1993, states “Huayi Video Company, owned by the Liaison Department of the P.L.A. General Political Department have [...] produced Karaoke tapes of popular Tibetan songs sung by famous Tibetan singers”. This document was leaked to International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), and was published in a report by ICT on 15 November 1993. Hardcopies of the ICT report (ISBN 1-879245-08-6; (c) 1993 ICT) are available from ICT. The report was also published on WTN on 16 November 2003, <http://www.tibet.ca/english/index.html>. See also Rachel Harris 2000 ‘From Shamanic Ritual to Karaoke: The (Trans)migrations of a Chinese Folksong’, CHIME 14: 48-60, which describes the transformation of a Sibe national minority shamanic ritual song into a modern propaganda song ‘Rejoice in Chairman Mao’s Kindness’ amidst the Mao-craze in China. It was released on a highly successful karaoke compilation cassette Red Sun (Hong Taiyang) in 1992.

Verbal messages

The verbal messages of most ‘revolutionary’ or ‘propaganda’ songs are very straightforward: praising Mao, expressing the people’s supposed happiness at ‘liberation’, or expounding political doctrine. Some are merely slogan-like, whilst others are more poetic, using imagery and metaphor. Thousands of these songs were composed. Here are some examples, largely chosen for their prominence in Tibet.

1. *Sharchog nay nyima shar*, ‘The East is Red’

This song is the Tibetan version of ‘The East is Red’, the most famous song of the Cultural Revolution.¹¹ Lobsang Dekyi described how it was sung at the start of each political meeting they had to attend. It uses the very common image of Mao as the sun.¹²

The East is red, the sun shines
 Mao Zedong is born in China
 He loves the people greatly
 A happy sun shines onto the world

2. *Ziji dan danwa’i*, ‘To the Magnificent Benevolent Sun’

The informant in TIN interview 1316 remembered having to sing this song to welcome arriving Chinese in the early 1950s, dancing with their arms held out carrying khatags, the Tibetan ceremonial white scarves. It was organised by the local Preparatory Committee (Tib: *dradrig uyon lhenkhang*). The first two lines are as follows:

To the magnificent benevolent sun
 With happiness and respect we go to
 offer scarves of welcome

3. *Boejong ngatsoei phayul rey* ‘Tibet is Our Country’

This song, which Lobsang Dekyi remembered being taught in the political meetings held prior to the Cultural Revolution, mixes Tibetan national pride with a message of the unity of the nationalities. In this sense it is more typical of a modern propaganda song rather than the older revolutionary songs praising Mao and socialism or quoting Mao’s thoughts.

¹¹ An account of the evolution of this song from a folk song is given on <http://www.morningsun.org/east/index.html>.

¹² The symbol of the sun is also commonly used to represent the Dalai Lama in Tibetan songs. However, this is unrelated to the use of the sun to represent Chairman Mao.

Tibet is our fatherland
Tibet is our fatherland
The green mountains, the place of the
nomads
The white snow mountains, the good
water, fields and grass
The well fed yak and sheep
So ya la, so ya la, so ya la
We love our country dearly
We love the motherland dearly
You play the *dranyen*
We play the *dranyen*
We sing and dance
All the nationalities are in one accord
Sing songs for Chairman Mao

4. *Kashag dugshoe rey* 'The Kashag¹³ is the Worst'

Sonam Dekyi, a former aristocrat, now a nun, recalled being made to sing this song in the aftermath of the 1959 uprising. The song praises the new order and compares it with the alleged cruelty of the old Tibetan government. Sonam Dekyi commented, "in their lyrics it was said that we wouldn't be beaten but they did beat us. We were beaten all the time":¹⁴

The Kashag is the worst, the worst
The new world is the best, the best
There is no one to beat us, no one to
scold us
No one to collect tax from us

¹³ The *Kashag* is the Tibetan cabinet in 'old' Tibet. The term is also used for the cabinet of the Tibetan government-in-exile.

¹⁴ TIN interview TIN 03-775, 19 August 2003.

5. *Beijing de jinshan shang*, 'Over the Golden Mountain of Beijing'¹⁵

This song became one of the most famous songs of the Cultural Revolution. Based on a Tibetan folk song from Kongpo, it was performed by Tseten Dolma, the most famous Tibetan 'official singer'. Tseten Dolma shot to nationwide fame in October 1959 when she sang 'Emancipated Serfs Sing Songs' in front of Mao, Zhou Enlai and other Party and state leaders at the 10th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. It is also one of the few revolutionary songs to have retained popularity in Tibet and across China since the end of the Cultural Revolution.

*The rays of the golden mountain of Beijing spread across the four directions,
Chairman Mao is just like the golden sun,
So warm and kind,
Brightening up the hearts of the serfs,
We are walking on the path that leads to socialist happiness.*

In 2002, Tsewang Wangmo released a pop version with a disco beat,¹⁶ and the song was also included on the album *Langla shang qin* 'The Feeling of the Mountain' by Han Hong, whose mother was Tibetan and father Chinese. This song is often performed in karaoke and *nangma* bars. Unlike the repetitive and martial sounding tunes of many revolutionary songs of the Cultural Revolution era, the tune of 'Over the Golden Mountain of Beijing', with its Tibetan folk song basis, is found to be very beautiful by Tibetans, even if many dislike the lyrics.

6. *Chi tsog ringlu yag* 'Socialism is Good'

'Socialism is Good' was one of the most widely taught songs from the democratic reforms (1959) onwards in Tibet. The song states, in a decidedly prosaic manner, the core slogans of the time. Despite the fact that China was moving from traditional socialism to a market economy from the 1980s, the song was still being taught widely in schools in the late 1980s and 1990s, and to prisoners in the 1990s as part of their 'reform'. It was also sung in Chinese. Dekyi recalled this song being sung accompanied by drums and cymbals as "*the people were made to tyrannise the aristocrats*".

Socialism is good

Socialism is good

Socialism establishes and develops the
people and the nation

Eliminate the reactionaries

Build a new Tibet!

¹⁵ This song can be heard on www.morningsun.org on the virtual radio.

¹⁶ Yangdon Dhondup, 'Dancing to the Beat of Modernity: the Rise and Development of Tibetan Pop Music', paper delivered at the 10th seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, St Hugh's College, Oxford University, 6-12 September 2003.

7. *Trungha mimang chithun gyalkhab kyi gyallu*, 'National Anthem of the People's Republic of China'

The most famous Chinese political song is of course the national anthem, which is widely sung at political ceremonies. Tian Han wrote the words for the national anthem, and Nie Er set the music in 1935. Originally known as the March of the Volunteers, it was the theme song of *The Sons and Daughters in Times of Turmoil*, a film that depicted how Chinese intellectuals marched bravely to the front in the war of resistance against Japan during the Second World War. It was particularly pushed in schools across the TAR as a part of the patriotic education campaign from September 1994 onwards.

Arise! All those who refuse to be slaves,

With our flesh and blood, we've built
our new Wall,
When the people of China are faced
with the greatest danger,
Shouting the last desperate cry of
defiance,
Arise! Arise! Arise!

Uniting in mind and spirit,

Facing at the enemy's cannons, march
on
Facing at the enemy's cannons, march
on

March on! March on! March on!

The following three songs are selected from a book of propaganda songs called Tashi pa'i toe lu, 'Auspicious Songs of Praise', published by Sichuan Publishing House. These songs are known to the younger generation of Tibetans from Tibet and which are in Tibetan rather than Chinese language.

8. *Shar chog ri la nyima shar*, 'The Sun Rises From the Eastern Mountain'

The sun shines on the eastern
mountain,

The sun shines on the eastern
mountain,

The sun shines, but this is not the sun,
this is the radiance of the communist

party
 The sun shines from the top of the
 eastern mountain
 The policies of the communist party
 have been great, have been great
 The radiance of Beijing

 Has shone upon our homeland

 The sun has risen on the eastern
 mountain,

 The sun has risen

9. *bde skyid 'dzompai' sa cha* 'The Place of Happy Gathering'

The place of the gathering of
 happiness,

 The land of our home country

 A-le-lo, the land of our home country,

 The leader of the great road of
 happiness is benevolent China
 Good fortune, please increase

 The leader of the great road of
 happiness
 Good fortune, please increase
 Ah! Good fortune,

 The leader of the great road of
 happiness is benevolent China, is
 benevolent China

 Good fortune, please increase.

10. *Ama chig gi bumo*, 'Daughters of the Same Mother'

This song is one of the most famous Chinese political songs. Like 'Over the Golden Mountain of Beijing' it remains popular today, being loved for its attractive melody, even by those who consciously disagree with the lyrical message.¹⁷ It expresses the well-worn image of the familial relationship between Tibetans and China, in this case with China and Tibet presented as sisters.

17 TIN interview TIN 03-1274 (follow up of TIN 03-1264), 16 October 2003.

The sun and the moon are daughters
of the same mother
The name of the mother, the name of
the mother is radiance
The Tibetans and the Chinese are
daughters of one mother
The name of the mother is China, The
name of the mother is China

The following songs are a selection of Chinese language propaganda songs taught across China and Tibet from the 1950s.

11. *Wu xing hong qi ying feng piao yang* 'The Five-Starred Red Flag Waving with the Wind'

This is one of the most famous Chinese propaganda songs, compulsorily taught across the PRC up till the end of the Cultural Revolution. It is a Red Army song, dating from the pre-1949 era.

The five starred red flag waving with
the wind,
How loud the sound of victory!
Singing about our beloved country,
From now on we walk towards
prosperity and strength,
Over the mountains and across the
plains.
Being independent and self-governing
is our ideal.
We have triumphed over many
difficulties.
We love our homeland and we love
peace.
We shall destroy whoever dares to
violate us.
We love our homeland!

12. *Si du yi shui* 'Crossing the Yi River'

Not as famous as *Wu xing hong qi ying feng piao yang*, but still widely known across the PRC, this is also a Red Army song. It dates from the 1930s, the era of the long march.

Cutting through the mountains and paths is difficult.
The sky is like fire and the rivers are like silver.
Loved ones bring water to quench our thirst.
Soldiers and masses are one family just like fish and water.
Braving the rains our bones become harder.
Eating wild grass, we become more determined than ever.
The revolutionary ideals are higher than the sky, higher than the sky.

13. *Zu guo zan ge* 'Praising the Motherland'

This excerpt dates from a song from the 1950s.

The Motherland is like a golden phoenix.
And the 'Four Modernisations' are the golden wings.
Fly towards the light, fly towards happiness.

14. *Xue ran de feng cai* 'Blood-Stained Elegance'

This is another Red Army song. In the first verse, the soldiers pay tribute to the 'masses', and in the second verse (not given), the 'masses' pay tribute to the soldiers.

Perhaps I may fall down never to wake again.
Would you believe that I have become a mountain range?
Perhaps my eyes would never open.
Would you understand my silent mood?
If this were the case please do not be sad.
On the flag of the republic is our blood stained elegance

15. *Ying xiong zan* 'Praising the Heroes'

This is another famous Red Army song.

Singing about the heroes in the dark
smoke,
The mountains on the four sides are
listening.
The People's soldiers chased away the
tigers and leopards.
Heroes' feet are stamping on the fire,
Giving up their lives to protect peace.
Why is it that the flags are like
paintings, Stained with the blood of the
heroes?
Why is it that Spring always remains in
the plains,
And heroes' lives are blossoming with
flowers?
A cry shakes the sky and the land,
And the mountains on the four sides
are listening.

16. *Wo ai Beijing tian an men* 'I Love Tiannamen in Beijing'

This is most commonly a children's song, dating from the 1950s, and is widely known across China.

I love the gate of Tiannamen in Beijing,
The sun is rising from it.
The great leader Chairman Mao is
guiding us as we move forward.

17. *Gong chan dang de qing* 'The Kindness of the Communist Party'

This is a famous revolutionary song dating from the early 1950s.

The sky of the communist party is
bright.
The people of the communist party are
happy.
The nationalities policy cares for the
masses.
The kindness of the communist party is
endless.

The following two songs were sung at the opening ceremony of the National Minority Games held in Lhasa in 1999 by Tseten Dolma and Dashi Metok.

18. *Xin zhong de zhu fu* 'Heartfelt Wish', sung by Tseten Dolma

The warm sun is shining over the
frontiers of the motherland.
The golden radiance spreads far and
wide over the snow mountains and
grassland.
We offer khatag to the sun,
And from now on we shall walk on the
golden path.
Happy songs are echoing across the
snow land.
Dancing steps are waking up the
mountains and rivers.
We offer beautiful wine to the Party
From now on the plateau shall fly
towards new blue sky.

19. *Xiangpala bing bu yao yuan* 'Shambala is Not Far Away', sung by Dashi Metok

There is a beautiful place.
People are longing to go there.
There the four seasons are always
green.
There the birds sing and the flowers
smell sweet.
There, there is no pain and there is no
sadness.
Shambala is its name.
Legend holds that this is where the
gods reside.
Ah, Shambala is not faraway,
Ah, Xiangpala is not faraway,
It is our homeland.

20. 'You Are the Daughter of Asia: A Song to Dawa Yang'

Dawa Yangzom, a young girl from a remote village in Tibet, was suddenly catapulted to nationwide renown when she was chosen to light the torch at the start of the 11th Asian Games held in Beijing in August 1990. She was described by Luo Zhijun, a vice-minister of the Chinese government who spoke at the torch ceremony, as "a *pure girl*" who

*“signifies the sacredness, purity and holiness of the 11th Asian Games”.*¹⁸ As a national minority, a female and a minor, Dawa Yangzom represented the ultimate child of the paternal Chinese state. She captured the Chinese official imagination to such an extent that not only was she taken on a high-profile trip to Beijing, but had a song written about her by Luo Nianyi, a popular music writer and propagandist. The song, ‘You Are the Daughter of Asia: A Song to Dawa Yang’, puts across the well-worn message that ‘Tibet is an inalienable part of China’ through its emphasis on Dawa Yangzom’s belonging to China through the familial bond of child to mother, ‘the daughter of the motherland, our girl’.¹⁹

You are the daughter of Asia: A song to Dawa Yang

You are the daughter of Asia, our girl. You came from the Nyenchengtanggula Mountain and fetched the flame to light the sacred fire for the Asian Games.

You are the daughter of the motherland, our girl. The General Secretary held your hand tightly, and you gave him an Arxi Hada [Tibetan ceremonial white scarf].

You are the daughter of the Snow Mountain, our girl. You are only 15 years old, the precious age, you Dawa Yangzom from the beautiful Yalu river.

*You are the pride of the Tibetan people, our glory, glory, glory.*²⁰

The message of the music and the performance

While the lyrics of such political songs as those described above promote the Party line through language ranging from poetic imagery to slogans and imperative commands telling people what to think and how to behave, the musical style and manner of performance also convey potent messages. As discussed in chapter 2, the state has created a ‘developed’ style of music through the nationwide system of dance troupes, which include Western instruments in traditional ensembles; Western harmonies, the use of voices formally or ‘scientifically’ trained in Western and Chinese operatic style, and formally staged performances. It is this ‘developed’ style which has been the standard for most professional music making in Tibet and the rest of the PRC since the 1950s, with folksongs and other traditional music being refined from their ‘crude’ and ‘raw’ form into ‘true’ art through rendition in this style. In this way, this music is not just a vehicle for propaganda in the form of altered plots of Tibetan operas, or the overtly political lyrics of revolutionary songs, but itself constitutes a form of propaganda through its embodiment of state-defined progress and its association with state institutions. In tandem with creating a ‘developed’ style that represents its own values, the state has also imposed control by either eliminating or sidelining traditional music that was created by the pre-socialist society and may therefore evoke it. This need to eliminate the echoes of the old society contained in the music is clearly revealed by this anecdote from the Cultural Revolution:

In the past, the Head chanter of Sera monastery always had to lead the chanting during the religious assembly with the deep ‘Ao ao’ style of singing at

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ *ibid*. Chinese lyrics unavailable

the start of prayers, and this was the kind of singing he was used to. So when he was told to sing a [revolutionary] song, he said "alright", and began singing 'Ao, socialism is good, socialism is good', preceding it with the traditional 'Ao, ao' style of his traditional monastic chanting. This made everybody laugh. Sometimes even government officials laughed. They said "Hey, that is the tune of blind faith. Sing nicely". The head chanter said that he was used to singing in this way and that it was very difficult for him to change.²¹

Although it was only during the Cultural Revolution that traditional music was completely banned, the bias of the state is apparent even today from the fact that truly traditional music is not performed at political festivals, but rather the 'developed' state style. Similarly, truly traditional costumes are not worn, but 'reformed' or 'developed' versions.

A further level of propaganda is also inherent in this state-created style due to the fact that through the centralised system of professional musical training in the PRC, this style has laid a common gloss on the musical styles of the different ethnic groups, or 'nationalities', of the PRC, and in this sense has united them. Hence, whilst the traditional musical styles of the 56 nationalities of the PRC have little or nothing in common with each other in terms of style and history, in the context of professional performances by state troupes, they are now shown to have many similarities, conveying the state's most pressing message of the unity of the nationalities. Without this common gloss, musical performance would reveal most of these ethnic groups to be truly distinct,²² which would tend to alienate them from the PRC and have an effect of 'endangering state security'. However, as well as the need to integrate the nationalities, the post-Cultural Revolution state also needs to convey a message of tolerance of minority culture. This fine balance of celebration of ethnic character on the one hand, and avoidance of the political alienation of the minority nationalities from the motherland on the other, is achieved through performances that embody 'national characteristics' in the form of musical style, instruments and costumes, while framing and finishing these 'national characteristics' with the state style. The state also choreographs the message of the unity of the nationalities in performances at festivals, through parades of different minority dancers all wearing their distinctive ethnic costumes (in 'reformed' form, as with the music), thus placing all these different ethnicities under the umbrella of the particular state-sponsored performance, and thereby displaying their unity and their allegiance to the state.

Perhaps the most potent message of state sponsored music-making in the PRC is that of power and domination, which is conveyed through several aspects of musical and performance style. The crudest way in which the state uses music to represent its might is through the vast scale performances of the big political anniversaries (such as decade celebrations of the 'liberation' of Tibet and so on) or the province-wide celebrations of political festivals (such as National Day). Whilst traditional performances may involve a maximum of a few dozen people at a time, these big political festivals can involve

21 TIN interview TIN 03-1318, 11 August 2003

22 Some nationalities have cultural ties that predate 1949, such as the Uyghurs and the Kazakhs, or the Huis, which were assimilated into China several centuries ago.

thousands of performers singing and dancing and as such constitute the biggest performance events in modern China, thus staging the omnipotence and omnipresence of the state in modern China.

The immense and lavish scale also promotes another central message of the state, that of wealth and economic development. This message may be further driven home by details of performance style, for example in the celebration of the National Minority Games held in Lhasa in 1999, the solo state singers such as Tseten Dolma sang standing through the sun-roofs of colourfully adorned cars, the ultimate symbol of economic development in poorer nations, driving majestically around the stadium. The use of vast scale spectacular performances are not unique to the Chinese authorities, but are widely used by governments, whether 'totalitarian' or 'democratic', and also non-political entities that want to convey a sense of powerful presence, might, magnificence and prosperity. Some other examples are the political rallies in Nazi Germany, US election campaigns, Wagner opera, rock concerts and the huge song and dance routines of Hindi films.

A further performance of state ideology popular at political festivals in China is the choreographing of large groups of cheerleader-style dancers into aerial formations that spell out explicitly political messages such as the dates 1951 (the 17-Point Agreement) or 1959 (the 'liberation' of Tibet). Apart from emphasising these politically loaded dates, such aerial formations of large numbers of people demonstrate particularly strongly the individual's importance only in so far as they are a part of the mass, for it is only when all individuals cooperate that the meaningful shape or symbol is made. This can be seen as echoing the state ideology, which values individual rights only as far as they do not threaten the coherence of the whole.²³ Solo performances do take place at political festivals, but they are of an explicit political nature, with singers such as Tseten Dolma singing overtly political songs, or balletic ethnic dance performances ('developed' as opposed to traditional performing arts). It must be noted that formations of non-politically significant shapes are also often used in Tibetan dance troupe performances inside and outside of Tibet.

Apart from the implication of the omnipotence, might and glory of the state and the insignificance of the individual relative to the mass, the large ensembles of political celebrations also display the control of the authorities over the masses, the ability of the state to have people perform for it at will. This message of control is further choreographed into details of these big state performances. For example, in the celebration held in 2000 to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP) in Sichuan province, dancers from each county in Kardze paraded round a sports stadium wearing bright, (reformed, 'developed') traditional costumes. In addition to the obvious message of tolerance of and enthusiasm for Tibetan culture, the message of the control of the masses by the state was also apparent through adaptations of the performance style of traditional dance:

²³ "The exercise by citizens of the People's Republic of China of their freedoms and rights may not infringe upon the interests of the state..." – Constitution of the People's Republic of China, Article 51.

- Whilst in traditional Tibetan dance, the dancers sing as they dance; on this occasion they were silent, dancing to Chinese style synthesised instrumental music played over loud speakers rather than Tibetan music created with their own Tibetan voices
- Whilst traditional Tibetan dance usually takes place in a circle or in lines and occupies one space, the dancers performed in ranks, combining traditional moves with a martial style that progressed around the stadium in a militaristic fashion.

In other words, the dancers, whilst parading superficial Tibetan ‘national characteristics’, were in fact dancing very much ‘to the tune of the state’. Traditional Tibetan performance practice was subordinated to a format that is militaristic in origin, and the performers were silenced, moving to the Chinese music. Such performances represent an intricately choreographed display of the Han state rule and domination over the Tibetans and the military force that maintains this rule. Indeed, attendance at these festivals is often compulsory, and so is performance.

The military is not just evoked through the martial adaptation of traditional Tibetan dance in such festivals, but is often also a physical presence. The 50th anniversary of the establishment of Kardze TAP in 2000, for example, began its extravagant performance with military parades of different regiments around the stadium, and then later moved onto the march/dancing of groups from the different counties and also parades by schools and work units. The military presence in the musical extravaganzas of political festivals is also made clear in official press reports of these occasions. For example, Xinhua reported about the celebrations of National Day In Lhasa in 1994:

*The sunshine city of Lhasa was festively decorated today, with colourful flags and banners fluttering over major streets. All the government institutions, enterprises and schools hang out huge streamers inscribed with the words “Warmly Celebrate the National Day”. The Chinese People’s Liberation Army units stationed in Tibet and all schools held flag raising ceremonies, with the singing of national anthem resounding in the air over this capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region. [...] Louba Linka [Norbulinka] was the centre stage of the National Day gala party. A dozen performing art troupes from five prefectures of the Tibet Autonomous Region gathered at a theatrical festival. Singing and dancing were seen also in many other parks in the city. [...]*²⁴

A report from China Tibet Information Center’s English language website on 27 July 2003 similarly describes the role of music in a military festival, the celebration in Lhasa of the PLA’s 76th anniversary:

The blue sky is crystal clear and the auspicious cloud curling up. On the morning of July 27, thousands of people had a get-together on the Square of

²⁴ Xinhua news agency, Beijing, in English, 1 October 94, from SWB 3 October 94.

Potala Palace to celebrate the Army's Day of its 76 anniversary. In the strong rubadub, thousands of armed policemen and masses assembled together to sing and dance. The general, the soldier and the masses took their dance step and exhibit their voices one after another.

Indirect musical propaganda

The use of music for propaganda purposes in Tibetan areas of the PRC goes far beyond the direct messages of the lyrics of political songs, or even the symbolic messages of the musical and performance style of much state-sponsored music. Music making is used extensively as a metaphor by the authorities to convey messages about the success of government policy in Tibet, the character of Tibetans relative to Chinese and ultimately, the legitimacy and necessity of Chinese rule in Tibet. Three of the most common messages the authorities attempt to convey through music are described below.

'The Tibetans are happy and prospering under Chinese rule'

Song and dance has been used to create an image of people happy under the Chinese communist rule since the earliest days of the Chinese Communist Party. After the 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet, endless articles and speeches used the image of the singing and dancing Tibetan as a symbol of the spontaneous joy of the Tibetans at their 'liberation' from feudal serfdom, such as this excerpt from a speech by Xie Chanju, First Secretary, CCP Committee, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Zhou, in 1959, celebrating the presumed success of the communalisation of land:

On September 15, the entire Kan-nan Chou [Gannan Zhou] (in Kansu [Gansu] Province) was completely communalized. Altogether there are 67 people's communes; 90.1% of the households, or 93.58% of the population, have joined the communes. The 46,000 Tibetan herdsmen, who only a short time ago still basically lived in a feudalistic society, have now, on the basis of having scored victories in the suppression of counter-revolutionaries and carried out a social reform, flown over several ages in the short period of a fortnight, and, singing and dancing, have now reached heaven in one stride, taking them into People's Communes in which are carried the seeds of communism.²⁵



Statue of Tibetans celebrating the unity of all 56 nationalities, Potala square, Lhasa'

25 Speech by Hsieh Chan-ju, First Secretary, CCP Committee, Kan-nan Tibetan Autonomous Chou, 6 November 1959.

Sonam Dekyi recalled how they had to sing songs in praise of the Chinese after they took control after 1959, being told that *“if we didn’t sing [it meant] we didn’t like communist China”*.²⁶ The Chinese authorities’ use of singing as a symbol for happiness is also apparent in Sonam Dekyi’s account of the restriction on singing and smiling following the death of Mao:

*When Mao Zedong died, I felt very happy from the core of my heart. However we were beaten if we smiled. We were not at all allowed to sing. My son was very worried [about me] because my mouth was often careless and would start a song. We allowed ourselves a smile in our courtyard [when Mao died]. My son came after me to warn me not to laugh. [...] Many people had been imprisoned when Mao Zedong was alive and even when he died many people were imprisoned for singing.*²⁷

The equation of singing and dancing with happiness with Chinese rule and policy continues in current propaganda, as the following quotes from China Tibet Information Centre’s English language website illustrate, now showing Tibetans to be satisfied with increasing material well-being and development.

Central Government Benefit Tibetans (18 October 2002)

Since the peaceful liberation of Tibet Autonomous Region, central government have helped Tibet in all fields. Tibetans will not forget forever the leaders of three generations. The Tibetans’ living standard is increasingly improved. Tibetans express their happiness and love by song and dance.

Tibetan Herdsmen Dance with Happiness (22 October 2002)

Tibetan people are now living a more and more pleasant life. In the picture: They are dancing to express their happiness.

Sing for Their Happy Life (20 November 2001)

The picture shows that Kangba [Khampa] people from Qamdo of Tibet who are dressing in new national-style costume express their happiness [sic] though singing and dancing.

Take a Bus in front of My Home (20 September 2002)

Early in the morning, Azhen, a 70 years old grandma in Dongga Village of Duilong Deqing County was waiting in front of home. In the new bus route, there is one stop in front of her home. Instead of walking three kilometres to go downtown, she now can take bus No.301 coming from the centre of Lhasa city.

The road downtown used to be muddy and rough. Many enthusiastic people, including the staff of bus No. 301 and 302, the workers of the cement factory nearby and local

²⁶ TIN interview TIN 03-775, 19 August 2003.

²⁷ *ibid.* No reports of imprisonment due to singing following Mao’s death have been confirmed, but 775’s statement expresses the fear of repercussions if they were seen to be singing in this period of national mourning.

villagers all volunteered in building the road. Singing happy working songs, people went to the narrow muddy road to work.

The new road not only facilitates the life of people in Dongga village, it also intensifies [sic] the village to Lhasa, the economic and cultural centre of Tibet Autonomous Region.

A *Xinhua* report on a tea party held by the Ethnic and Religious Committee describes a fairytale scene where top leaders including Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji met with deputies of ethnic origin to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), apparently talking warmly, like old friends, accompanied by joyous ethnic performances.

The lights were bright and colourful and spring was very much in the air. Meetings at this distinguished gathering made people feel full of pride and enthusiasm ... Wonderful art and literary programmes were performed at the tea party. The beautiful melody of the songs "Blooming Flowers and Full Moon", the "Love Song of the Western Region", and "Getting Better and Better", the musical dance "Love My China", and the panpipe show the "Olive Tree", as well as the superb acrobatic performance "Small Martial Arts" [...] fully and vividly displayed the artistic charm of China's various ethnic groups, and expressed the people of various nationalities' eulogy to happy life, their ardent love for the great motherland, and their blessings for their beautiful future.²⁸

That the Tibetans (and other minorities) are typically represented as expressing their joy through song and dance depicts them as childish, almost inarticulate. There is also no room for the interpretation that at least some Tibetans sing, as do many people in many cultures of the world, to cheer themselves up, to forget their sorrows and to cope in times of adversity. Indeed, singing in prison in Tibet is widespread. Given the history of Tibet, these sorrows are at least in part connected to the Chinese presence and anger at the numerous failings of the regime, particularly up until 1980. The logic of the image of the happy, singing, dancing Tibetan, however, attempts to rob Tibetan music of all but one emotional meaning, and like the regime itself, thereby attempts to preclude even the smallest hint of dissent.

The use of singing as a symbol for happiness and content reached a level that can only be described as farcical in an article that formed part of a series of reports on prisons in Tibet. Here, prison is implausibly depicted as a place full of happy inmates who had formed a band. The prison band 'New Life' did exist,²⁹ but it is not something that offers a holistic representation of life in Tibetan prisons.³⁰

28 *Xinhua*, Beijing, in Chinese 10 Mar 2002, SWB AS1 AsPol cdc/cg.

29 TIN interview TIN 02-1219, 8 November 2002.

30 Prisoners do engage in musical activities, and music offers solace to many inmates, as is described in chapter 5. A large amount of protest singing has also occurred in Tibetan prisons (see next chapter).

**'We like The Beatles best', part of special feature 'Prison on the plateau',
Xinhuanet 29 May 2002**

LHASA, May 29 (Xinhuanet) -- In the middle of a hot drumbeat comes the heavy-metal sound of an electric guitar, and a man singing in a harsh and magnetic voice over the loudspeaker.

If the musicians weren't wearing jail uniforms, you might think you were sitting through a performance by a professional band. It is hard to believe that these players are actually prisoners in the Prison of Tibet Autonomous Region.

Feng Jun, aged 31, who is a music graduate from Neijiang Normal College in southwest China's Sichuan Province, is one of the founders of the prison's 12-member rock 'n' roll band. Feng has been in jail since 1997 after being convicted of theft. That year he set up a two-member band at the prison.

"I wanted to start up a band when I arrived in jail as I found that quite a number of inmates here are highly talented musicians, so I applied to the warden for permission," Feng recalled, "They soon agreed and provided a place and musical instruments."

Warden Lu Bo is one of the jail bosses who authorized the setting up of the band. "Prisoners are here for having committed crimes, but we feel obligated to add some entertainment in their dull routine lives here," said the warden.

Feng Jun is the soul of the band. He writes songs and music and guides the other members.

"Our shows are popular with inmates and make them happy as they are based on prison life," said Feng. He admitted that because all the performances were given inside the prison, audiences were small, lighting was dim and sound effects weren't so good either.

The band's first performance was held to celebrate the return of Hong Kong to China on July 1, 1997, according to Feng Jun.

Since then the number of members has increased to 12. With the special permission of the prison authorities, band members can spend all their time rehearsing apart from cultural courses.

Liao Huabing, the band's bass player and vocalist, is a fervent music fan. He likes a lot of singers and bands, including Tibet's Deqen Wangmo, Whitney Houston, and Dynasty, a rock 'n' roll band popular in China.

"But I like the Beatles of Britain best," said Liao. As well as music tapes mailed to him by his relatives, the prison guards help him and the others buy the latest sounds.

Zhao Jun, 42-year-old band sound-man, is the oldest member. "Rehearsing is the thing I like best as I can sing as long as I like," said Zhao.

But the band must strictly follow prison rules regarding work and rest times. Songs should be healthy and positive in life attitude.

Tibetan inmate Dobgyai is a multi-talented band member: he is a drummer, dancer, singer and comedian. The others follow his style. "Our band might also be able to perform at major evening galas," he said.

So far the band has given 30 performances. Feng Jun expressed his dream that they could perform outside the prison some day.

While urging the prison authorities to give the band more opportunities, Feng said he wanted to show his friends the real face of the prison via its music.

This attempt to present Drapchi as a happy place to a group of visiting journalists through introducing them to 'New Life' backfired, as illustrated by the article 'A House of Horrors or a Cartoon Xmas: China's Charm Offensive Takes a Strange Turn in Drapchi Prison' by Ben Dolven in *Far Eastern Economic Review* on 26 September 2002.

'Tibet: a land of song and dance'

The 'dancing and singing equals happy' formula also works hand in hand with an image of Tibet as a land of song and dance to build up a sense that the Tibetans are in a near constant state of euphoria. For example, an article about Tibetan dance on *China Tibet Information Center*, China's main English language Tibet-related website, states: "Nearly every Tibetan can sing and dance. They sing anytime for any event and dance at festivals, weddings, gatherings and during their spare time".³¹ Another article on the site writes about Shigatse as follows: "Xigaze is claimed as the hometown of song and dance. The ardent and lively *duishi* [toeshay] dance is the most popular and the *gorshi* [korshay] dance scene is of the largest scale. Each place has its own characteristic folk dance".³² Chamdo is similarly introduced: "Known as *Khamba*, Qamdo is home to 570,000 people famous for their singing and dancing, industriousness and hospitality".³³ In an article about the Mount Qomolangma Cultural Festival, another Chinese official website introduced Shigatse with the same cliché: "Dubbed 'an ocean of songs and dances', Xigaze is known for its unique Tibetan culture".³⁴ These clichés are not just applied to the

31 http://www.tibetinfo.com.cn/english/culture/c_plaza/art/art_03.htm

32 http://www.tibetinfo.com/tibetz/rikaze/5_Today%20Xigaze/d/1.htm

33 <http://www.tibetinfo.com/tibetz/changdu/c5.htm> The Khampas are more typically regarded in Tibet as being direct and rather fierce and were in fact the most active in armed resistance against the Chinese.

34 'Tibet to hold cultural festival at foot of highest peak', <http://www.china.org.cn/english/travel/74826.htm>

Tibetans but to all of China's minorities, and have been internalised by not just the Han Chinese but also many Tibetans themselves.³⁵

Interestingly, identical clichés are found repeated by Tibetan exiles. In a speech opening a traditional music workshop held by the education department of the Tibetan government in exile and the Tibetan Institute of Performing arts, the chief guest former Kalon Shewo Lobsang Dhargyal said: "*Singing is an important aspect of the Tibetan way of life. Nowhere else would one find more songs for different occasions than in the Tibetan culture*".³⁶ Jamyang Norbu's introduction to his edited collection on Tibetan music and drama, *Zlos-gar*, is similar although more scholarly, with statements such as "*A fondness for dancing is [...] marked in the Tibetan character*".³⁷ Although the Tibetan exiles would never link this clichéd representation to the presumed happiness of the Tibetans (Kalon Shewo Lobsang Dhargyal went on to say how song is something that gets Tibetans through difficult times such as prison terms and Jamyang Norbu's article concentrates on details of Tibetan performing traditions and their ancient and modern history), the characterisation is used as a marker of ethnicity. In exile, such representation tends to define Tibetans in opposition to Westerners, as the holders of an authentic, colourful and spontaneous culture.³⁸ In the context of modern China, the love of singing and dancing defines the Tibetans' ethnicity (and that of the other minority nationalities) in opposition to the serious, paternalistic and politically powerful and competent image of the Chinese.³⁹ The resulting opposition of the serious, grown-up majority or ruling race, and the colourful, playful, childlike ethnic minority is typical of colonial rule or other forms of dominance over one race by another.

Although music is important in Tibet and it is undeniable that many Tibetans enjoy singing, there is no evidence that music is more important or widespread in Tibet than in other societies. Music, like speech, is a universal human activity. Songs for different occasions exist in most if not all societies of the world, including Han China and the West. It can be said that a large number of people in Tibet (and rural Han China) engage in active singing, since traditional music in Tibet is largely participative and carried out by non- or semi- professionals, and this contrasts with the musical culture of the West and other industrially advanced societies where music production is concentrated in the hands of relatively few often highly trained professionals. However, the popularity of amateur music making in the West should not be discounted, or the level to which advanced capitalist societies are subsumed with background music (such as in shopping arcades, public toilets, films and television). Ironically, the Chinese state's cultural policy, in its increasing of the professionalisation of Tibetan music, is likely to decrease this kind

35 See quote from taxi driver, chapter 1. The reaction of Tibetans to this characterisation is discussed in the section below.

36 'Tibet is an ocean of songs, says former Kalon', Tibetan Bulletin March-April 2003, <http://www.tibet.net/tibbul/2003/0303/dhasa1.html>. The Indians may dispute this assertion – see next footnote.

37 Jamyang Norbu (ed.) 1986 *Zlos-Gar*, Performing Traditions of Tibet: 2

38 Similarly, the typical reason given by Indians for the presence of songs in Hindi films as opposed to Hollywood films is that 'Indians are a very musical race'. In fact, songs also mark life cycle rituals in even the most urban of western contexts (birth, marriage and death), and Hollywood films are full of music and songs, but in the background score, not performed 'live' by characters.

39 See Gladney 1994 'Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities'. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 1: 92-123.

of folkloric Tibetan musicality. It is also ironic that the Chinese Communist Party, an essentially Han Chinese institution, which has employed mass singing on a level possibly unsurpassed by any other group, should be using a love of song to characterise the non-Han nationalities.

Rather than having any kind of sociological basis, these clichés of Tibet as a land of song and dance, along with a host of other exotic portrayals, are intended to show that China accepts and encourages Tibetan culture and is not trying to assimilate it. Indeed, Tibetan music and dance is vigorously encouraged by the state, although in forms strongly shaped by modern Chinese aesthetics, and is tolerated in its traditional form. However, in the presence of many other national characteristics, song and dance is the one particularly seized upon by the Chinese authorities probably because it does not appear threatening to Chinese rule, unlike, for instance, Tibet's traditional social and political structure, which is just as ancient and distinctive as its songs and dances. The singing and dancing image of Tibetans also presents them as childlike and unserious and hence in need of guidance, thus creating a sense of necessity for Chinese rule in Tibet based on the welfare of Tibetans as opposed to the historically based claims to legitimacy. The following excerpt from a Xinhua article shows particularly clearly how the happiness of the Tibetans, their spontaneous singing, and the presence of the paternal Chinese state, always present to save them from disaster, have been linked, and how music has become a fundamental aspect of the control of ethnic unrest through the nationalities policy.

Excerpts from one of a series of reports from Tibet by Xinhua to mark the 50th anniversary of the 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet, 11 May 2001 (SWB AsPol cdc)

In Tibet, whenever you ask Tibetan for directions, he or she will give you a pure smile like an old friend. A lama, a nun or an old man holding a canister for singing sutras you meet with in the autonomous region often return you a simple, honest and understanding smile when you smile to them. ...

Those Tibetan men who walk on the street may sometimes sing suddenly and then laugh frankly. And Tibetan girls, dressed as fashionable as those in eastern coastal areas of China, travel by tractors, laughing and singing in Tibetan language all the way. ...

They love to smile when looking at animals such as dogs and yaks, and the smile is calm and kind. They also smile when making mistakes or jokes, and they often smile like kids. ...

They welcome people from the inland areas of China with sweet smiles and they love making jokes when working on the farmland and laugh amusedly. They chant ballads which they have compiled praising creditable living Buddhas and Communist Party cadres.

... Sangmu, 84, used to be a serf and could not keep body and soul together before the liberation of the Tibet, now has a large area of farmland of his own, herds of domestic animals and household electric appliances. He cannot help smiling when talking about his happy life today. ...

Xinhua reporters visited a Tibetan whose son was hurt at the waist during a devastating flood. His family now lives in houses built by the government. His son has been sent to a local hospital for treatment with the help of the government.

‘Tibetan culture is flourishing, it has not been destroyed’

Media reports and academic-style research

The enthusiasm in defining Tibet as a land of dance and song also supports another of the Chinese authorities’ central messages regarding Tibet, that Tibetan culture is flourishing and that claims from outside China that it has been destroyed are false. Official documents, speeches and media reports also directly refute the suggestion that Tibetan culture has been or is being destroyed and claim that it is in fact flourishing as never before. For example, an article in *People’s Daily* on 21 July 2000 entitled ‘Fine Tibetan Culture Heritage Will Be Carried On Forever’ had the following opening paragraph:

Research Fellow Huang Hao from the Ethnic Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences said that all views about the extinction of Tibetan culture are absolutely nonsensical talk. Actual life proves that since after Democratic Reform was carried out in Tibet, its fine Tibetan culture has all the time been well kept and developed.⁴⁰

In his speech on literature and art in July 1997, then Tibet Party Secretary Chen Kuiyuan stated the case more strongly, making the extraordinary claim that it was only with the ‘liberation’ of Tibet that Tibetan culture flourished:

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.⁴¹

Not only does such propaganda refute the claims of Westerners and Tibetans outside Tibet that Tibetan culture has been destroyed, but it presents Tibetan culture as greatly improved. In other words, the Chinese are presented as helping the Tibetans and the

40 http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200007/21/eng20000721_46099.html. With the democratic reform in Tibet (TAR) taking place in 1959, this statement even manages to include the ten years of the Cultural Revolution as an era when “*fine Tibetan culture has ... been well kept and developed*”. See also China’s *White Paper on Tibetan Culture*, 22 June 2000, for a similar though slightly less defensive message, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/features/tibetpaper/tibet.html>.

41 *Xizang Ribao*, Lhasa, in Chinese 16 July 97, SWB AS1 AsPol mk

Tibetans as needing their guidance, another part of the picture that legitimises the Chinese presence in Tibet above and beyond historical claims. While this is a speech by a high-level party official, similar views are to be found in other material, including academic research. The following is an excerpt from the first chapter of Han scholar Professor Wang Yao's 1986 book *Tales from Tibetan Opera*. This passage clearly demonstrates the extent to which academic research may overlap with overt political propaganda. However, although such a page or two of the Party line is common in many academic publications, it must be emphasised that it does not necessarily bear any relation to the information value of the remainder of the work.

In the feudal society of serfdom, the actors of the Tibetan opera led as miserable a life as other serfs. [...] They [actors and actresses] eked out their livelihood on scanty donations and by farming a small plot of land which the manorial lords rented to them. [...] They were menaced by starvation and diseases and suffered humiliation by officials and aristocrats. This seriously affected the development of opera and the improvement of artistry. Many opera troupes declined, but thanks to the consistent efforts of a few actors who remained faithful to theatrical art in precarious times, this precious artistic heritage survived.

The artists did not make their painstaking efforts in vain. Since the 1950s, Tibetan opera has bloomed with a new vitality. Owing to the attention of the artists and the people, a state-owned Tibetan opera troupe was formed in Tibet. [...]

Actors have been respected more than ever before. [...] Many veteran actors have been elected members of the local political consultative conferences and deputies to the local people's congresses and have taken an active part in the political activities of the country. A number of pieces chosen from the Tibetan opera from the programme of national theatrical festivals have been popular among the people of China's various groups, very different from the days before 1949. As [a famous artiste] said, "Spring comes to the withered tree and flowers blossom again".

Guided by the principle in literature and art of "letting a hundred flowers blossom and weeding the old to bring forth the new", writers and artists have studied and rearranged the traditional features of Tibetan opera. They have improved costumes, stage props, settings and make-up by assimilating elements of the classical operas of the Han culture. [...]

With social progress and the development of production in Tibet, economic prosperity and cultural efflorescence will inevitably affect Tibetan opera, which reflects social life and is bound to respond to the new cultural development in Tibet.⁴²

42 1986: 12-13, Beijing: New World Press. Wang Yao also includes the Cultural Revolution in his sweeping statement "Since the 1950s, Tibetan opera has bloomed with a new vitality".



Cover of periodical showing Tibetan man playing the piwang

In addition to such overt remarks about the state of Tibetan culture now as compared to the pre-Chinese era, the authorities also disseminate a constant flood of news stories about the performing arts or articles about folklore in the official media in order to portray Tibetan culture as flourishing. The *China Tibet Information Center*, China's main English language Tibet-related website, has published a long article on Tibetan opera (also written by Wang Yao), a series of articles on Tibetan dance, an article about the Tibetan epic *Ling Gesar* and a section on pop musicians of Tibet as well as frequent news stories and photographs about musical festivals, performances and other events.⁴³ Similarly, *China's Tibet* always includes at least one article on folk music traditions and reports on festivals inside Tibet and the visits of dance troupes abroad, and also reports on the preservation of folk traditions, most commonly the *Gesar* epic.

However, although such reports serve a propaganda purpose, most go beyond propaganda, providing a significant degree of factually based and relatively neutrally-expressed information about a range of often little-known performing traditions. Others, however, remain politically loaded, such as praising cultural progress or presenting Tibetans in an exotic or demeaning manner, and have little information value. For example, an article on *China Tibet Information Center's* English language website 'China's ethnic groups' dances' from 13 September 2003 reports on a Tibetan dance:

On the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, people have created a special dance genre called Yi Bian Shun. When people dance, their left arm stretches out to accompany the left foot, while normally the left arm would match the right foot. Because oxygen is scarce on the highland and the roads are bumpy, locals find this way of walking to be more comfortable. Their funny walk developed into a dance.

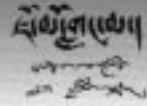
However, through the post-Cultural Revolution nationalities policy and liberalisation, the state has brought itself into a more comfortable position where information based on facts can serve its propaganda needs by demonstrating Tibetan culture to be alive, and showing Chinese tolerance and liking for traditional Tibetan culture. Traditional culture is not against current ideology, as it was against socialist and Maoist ideology before and during the Cultural Revolution. In other words, it is nowadays far easier for reports to stick to facts and have value as information and to still be politically correct, or at least not politically incorrect. However, the information is of course selective; for example, in the Tibetan folk song volume of the massive state-run documentation project *Anthology of Folk Music of the Chinese People* (Ch: *Zhongguo minzu minjian yinyue jicheng*), the one important genre that is of course conspicuously absent is Tibetan nationalist songs.

Academic-style research also has played an increasingly important role in the message of a flourishing Tibetan culture. The Chinese authorities greatly publicise the level of research taking place on Tibetan culture, since it shows them to be respecting and nurturing this culture, and they have also realised that for the Western audience,

43 See 'Culture Plaza' http://www.tibetinfo.com.cn/english/culture/c_plaza/menu.htm; 'Folk Customs' <http://www.tibetinfo.com.cn/english/culture/folk/menu.htm>; and 'Beautiful Songs in Tibetan' http://www.tibetinfo.com.cn/tibet/en/zyfy/zyfy_3_si.htm.

大型乐舞《珠穆朗玛》

Musical Dance Qomolangmo



从古至今七世的松赞
干布和文成公主。
Tibet King Songtsen
Gampo and his Han
wife Princess
Wendzang.

古老而优雅的
民间舞阿佳舞
Archieve
dance
popular in
Ngari.

为庆祝中华人民共和国成立50周年和西藏民主改革40周年，国家文化部和西藏自治区人民政府共同推出大型西藏乐舞《珠穆朗玛》。

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 40th anniversary of the Democratic Reform in Tibet, the Ministry of Culture and the people's government of the Tibet Autonomous Region staged the Tibetan musical dance titled Qomolangmo.

丁卫刚 才吉松
Photos by
DING WEIGUO
& CAIJI



用皮毡击鼓的
山南舞。
Beating drums
with goat-hair,
a drum dance
unique to
Shannan.



阳光下的高原，姑娘们在水边手舞足蹈。.
Girls dancing gracefully.



象征生命的鹰舞之舞。
Eagle Dance, symbol of life.

academic-style research is far more credible than traditional propaganda.⁴⁴ Research, however, does not necessarily have an impact on preserving living musical traditions. However, while modern Tibetology in China serves a propaganda purpose, sometimes explicitly stating the Party line despite even obvious facts as in the piece quoted above, much of it goes beyond propaganda, and has resulted in genuine and valuable research on Tibetan musical traditions. While research does serve a propaganda purpose and propaganda may be dressed up as research, at the same time the standards of research are just as likely to influence the information value of propaganda. In the last ten years in particular, it has become far easier for Tibetan and Chinese scholars to travel, study abroad, attend conferences and furthermore, to interact with other scholars while abroad. The first time Tibetans from Tibet attended the International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS) conference was in 1992 in Norway, and they were extremely restricted in who they could talk to and which papers they could listen to. However, in the IATS conference of September 2003 held in Oxford, Tibetans attended papers given by Tibetans from the exile government, and mixed with little restriction. It has also become far easier for Western (though not Tibetan exile) scholars to undertake research in Tibet and to therefore produce research based on first-hand observation, although it is still compulsory to be accompanied by a 'research assistant' while undertaking fieldwork. Journalists, however, are still very restricted in their official capacity, and receive highly choreographed tours, although many visit Tibet unofficially.

Research specifically on music in the PRC began from folksong collecting, a great predilection of Chinese socialism, and while people still collate and compile large volumes of folk songs, usually translated into Chinese, large amounts of research on Tibetan musical traditions is being carried out by Tibetan and Chinese scholars in the PRC, including increasing amounts of research of a more anthropological, sociological and ethnomusicological nature. For example *The Anthropology of Music* by Alan Merriam has been translated into Chinese as the PhD thesis of a Chinese student, Mu Qian, who works at the Features Department of *China Daily*.⁴⁵ This core ethnomusicology text argues for the study of music on its own terms, in its own cultural context and in a non-ethnocentric way, which flies in the face of traditional Chinese ways of viewing Tibetan and other 'minority cultures'. Although there are indications of the compromising of academic research to suit the Chinese or government point of view, even in Western-based research, as interest in anthropological or ethnomusicological style research increases, ideas of cultural relativism and the point of view and objectivity of the researcher will impinge on research done in China, which could ultimately have wide-reaching implications on the way Tibetan culture is represented in the media and how ordinary people begin to view it.⁴⁶ As Janet Upton points out in her discussion of the controversial Tibetan-theme album *Sister Drum* by Han musicians:

44 See TIN Special Report 'Propaganda and the west: China's struggle to sway international opinion on the "Tibet Issue"' <http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/nu160701.htm>. See also 'Tibetology – the New Propaganda' published by International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) <http://www.savetibet.org/News/News.cfm?ID=1159&c=6&Type=s>

45 Janet Topp-Fargion, personal communication December 2003. Mu Qian was not specialising in Tibetan music.

46 The East Asia volume of *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music* published in 2002, for example, includes an article by the Han scholar Mao Jizeng entitled, 'The Music of China's Minorities: An Overview'. The article undertakes to discuss the genres and musical features of all the minority musical traditions, most of which have virtually no historical connection with each other. Whilst it would make sense to discuss the minority traditions en masse in their modern, political context, this survey of styles and genres

We should not forget that the high level of current western interest in Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism has grown out of a legacy of colonialism and Orientalism,⁴⁷ a legacy that has only recently been subjected to critique.⁴⁸

Foreign tours of dance troupes

Since the late 1980s, the Chinese authorities have also seized on the dance troupes as an ideal medium to present an image of flourishing Tibetan culture as a first-hand experience to foreigners and Tibetans outside Tibet, the most important group to convince that Tibetan culture is alive.

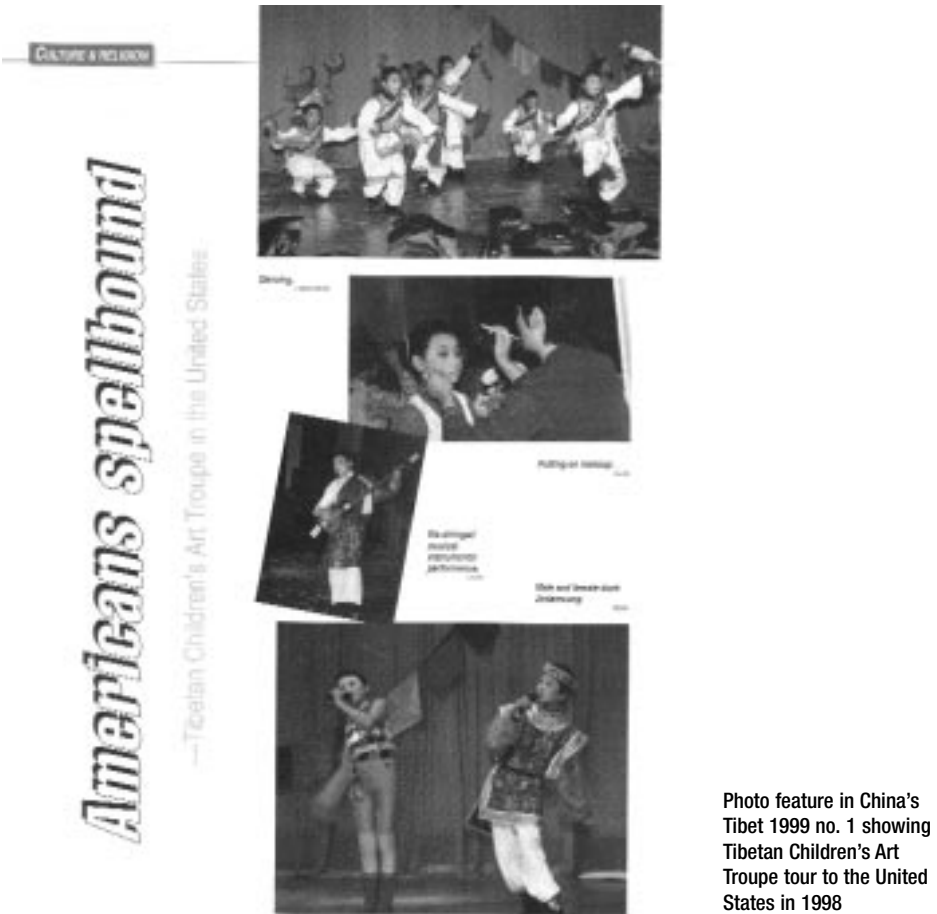


Photo feature in China's Tibet 1999 no. 1 showing Tibetan Children's Art Troupe tour to the United States in 1998

serves little else but to connect the unconnected traditions and help the 'unity of the nationalities' in a parallel way to the government dance troupes. Perhaps it was planned to deal with all the minority traditions together in the interests of space, but given that the section for China as a whole is 438 pages long, a section of 84 pages covering the music of all the minorities of China appears suspiciously like Han domination of minority culture. It has also been pointed out that Jizeng's article on Tibetan music in the same publication hardly mentions Tibetan religious music, focussing on secular genres instead (Henrion-Dourcy 2001 *The Singing Mask: Echoes of Tibetan Opera*: 5). This de-emphasising of religious genres is typical of Chinese research on Tibetan music (Ben Wu 1998 'Music scholarship West and East: Tibetan music as a case study of Asian music').

47 An ethnocentric view of the Orient seen through western eyes. See chapter 1 for a discussion of the ethnocentric or 'Chinese Orientalist' views of Tibet.

48 2002 'The Politics and Poetics of Sister Drum: "Tibetan" Music in the Global Marketplace': 111-112.

Zeng Jian-Hui, then Vice-Minister of the Propaganda Ministry of the CCP Central Committee, stated in a speech at the Conference on the Work of External Propaganda on the Question of Tibet, 10 March 1993:

With regard to the attacks by the west and the Dalai Clique and their frequent activities, our external propaganda should launch offensives. We should expand our spheres of influence; in particular, we should infiltrate our propaganda into the mainstream life of the west. Firstly, we should continue to send Tibetan scholars and Tibetan singing and dancing troupes abroad to lecture and perform.⁴⁹

The statement from Zhao Qizheng, minister in charge of the Information Office of the State Council, PRC, at the meeting on research in Tibetology and external propaganda on Tibet, 12 June 2000, boasts of the achievements to date:

We have sent 23 groups of artistes to give performances at international cultural and experience-sharing forums in over 80 cities in over 40 countries. They have given over 400 performances to over 800,000 people.⁵⁰

Large numbers of articles appear in the official media concerning the foreign visits of the dance troupes. Gyaincain Norbu (Tib. Gyaltsen Norbu), speaking at a farewell function for the Chinese Tibet Art Troupe on 11 May 1994 before their departure for Austria, stated that they served “*not only as a key foreign propaganda project for Tibet, but also a major cultural exchange programme with foreign countries*”.⁵¹ Another radio broadcast on 18 June 1994 describes a “*victory meeting*” held by the State Council Information Office, the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee, the State Nationalities Affairs Commission and the Ministry of Culture for a Tibetan art troupe that had just returned from its “*maiden international tour*”:

[The troupe] demonstrated to the world that the magnificent Tibetan culture is fully protected and flourishing in the vast territory of the motherland, exposing with facts the rumours spread by splittist forces abroad and enabling more people to gain a correct understanding of Tibet.⁵²

China's Tibet has carried several articles about trips of Tibetan troupes abroad, with handpicked quotes from Tibetans and Westerners. For example, the article covering the visit of the Tibet Children's Art Troupe to the United States in autumn 1998:

49 Official document leaked to International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) on 15 November 1993. See footnote [44].

50 'Tibet-Related External Propaganda and Tibetology Work in the New Era', leaked to ICT. Available on <http://www.savetibet.org/News/News.cfm?ID=1159&c=6&Type=s>. The statement details the increasing emphasis put on Tibetology as a new form of propaganda. See below.

51 *Tibet People's Broadcasting Station*, Lhasa, 11 May 1994, in standard Chinese.

52 'Art Troupe's Tour Shows Tibet's Culture is "Fully Protected and Flourishing"' *Tibet People's Broadcasting Station*, Lhasa, 18 June 1994 (SWB 22 June 1994 FE/2028 G/16, 28)

Most Americans know Tibet through their local mass media. In their mind, Tibet is a land where Tibetan culture has suffered from suppression. When they saw these children, they gained a better understanding of the Tibetan situation.

“These children are unrestrained and lively. From this we understand they come from a free and happy land, instead of a despotic land” said a former American official in Argentina.⁵³

Getting the message?

Direct propaganda

The above sections have described a range of ways in which the state uses music directly or indirectly to convey its ideology: song lyrics, musical style, or the characterisation of Tibet and Tibetans as opposed to Chinese in terms of music and musicality. However, the question of whether people actually receive these messages, or how effective this propaganda is, is more complicated. What people understand from any given piece of information, however politically pointed that information may be, depends on how they interpret it, which depends on their own point of view, background, knowledge and so on.⁵⁴ Although information can be controlled by the state, it is not possible to entirely control people’s reactions. For example, Tibetans may find the state-sponsored musical style ‘developed’ in the sense of it being impressive or better than traditional styles, but they may also find it alienating, since it has been externally imposed and is the music of professionals rather than the general masses, or they may resent it as a symbol of Chinese domination of Tibetan culture. Many Tibetans, for example, acknowledge that Tseten Dolma has a ‘good voice’, but others profoundly dislike the sinicised style she has adopted, which goes hand in hand with the pro-Chinese lyrics of her songs. Ironically, most Tibetans find the performances of state singers such as Tseten Dolma old-fashioned now, a relic of the Cultural Revolution – hardly the intended message – and have little interest in her songs, as Tibetan opera scholar Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy describes:

Nowadays, [Tseten Dolma’s] CDs are purchased mainly by Chinese customers. Amongst Tibetans, they are the usual gifts that work units distribute to their workers, who immediately and dismissively throw them away.⁵⁵

Even with the most explicit aspect of propaganda music, the lyrics, the intended messages do not necessarily reach people. Interestingly, many Tibetans describe being unaware of political meanings in songs they were taught by rote in schools or dance troupes. Dolma, for example, learned the song ‘The Tibetans and Chinese are Daughters

53 China’s Tibet No. 1 1999: 45

54 See also discussion on interpretation in relation to Tibetan protest songs, chapter 5.

55 Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy (forthcoming) ‘Women in Performing Arts: Portraits of Six Contemporary Singers’: 17, in Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik (eds.) *Women in Tibet: Past and Present*. London/New York: Hurst and Co./Columbia University Press.

of the Same Mother' in her childhood but did not realise it was political until she arrived in exile in her late teens:

During those times we didn't know the meaning of the song but [the Chinese authorities] took interest in that song. After coming [to India] I learnt the meaning of the song.⁵⁶

Another Tibetan described people's reactions to 'Over the Golden Mountain of Beijing' and 'Tibet and China are Daughters of the Same Mother': "*Their tunes are really beautiful, and the people didn't really take much notice of the lyrics*".⁵⁷ The only kinds of songs that could be seen as illustrating a significant take-up of a certain kind of state propaganda by today's independent pop artistes, or an overlap in Tibetan views and state policy, are the 'educational' songs that give people advice such as urging them to become educated, to send their children to school and not to kill wild animals. They do not involve the praising of the Party, Mao, the motherland or the stating of China's claim to Tibet. Tenpa, for example, described singing such songs when he toured remote nomadic areas of eastern Tibet in 1998:

[We sang a song called] Ridag kyolu ('Sad Song of Wild Animals'). The subject matter of Ridag kyolu is that many nomads in nomadic areas carry guns and kill many animals. Many elderly people cried when they heard this song we had written and performed. They said that it was good if we sang songs like these because their sons carry guns and kill animals. Then when we went to schools we sang songs with messages like for parents not to send their children to look after the animals in the morning but instead to send them to school. [...] Then we sang educational songs like the Tibetan alphabet etc. The nomads do not consider studying as an important and essential matter. They consider their son as a good boy if he looks after the animals well. This is wrong. He should study.⁵⁸

Whether due to existing political views, the forced nature of the singing or, particularly in the case of the Cultural Revolution, sheer boredom from having to sing the same songs over and over again propaganda songs can become a focus of hatred or resentment. When asked what her least favourite song was, the dissident nun Ngawang Sangdrol replied "*the Chinese national anthem*".⁵⁹ The Tibetan interviewed in TIN interview 1316, who was not a political activist, though had spent time in prison as a former aristocrat, mentioned the song '*Socialism is Good*' as one she particularly disliked. Another Tibetan reported that while it was acceptable for Chinese people to sing Chinese propaganda songs, Tibetans detest it when a Tibetan such as Tseten Dolma sings these songs.⁶⁰ There is also a rumour widespread amongst Tibetans that Tseten Dolma became involved in an affair with either Mao Zedong or Zhou Enlai (accounts differ) following her

56 TIN interview TIN 03-1080, 20 March 2003.

57 TIN interview TIN 03-1274, 16 October 2003, follow up of JW 1264.

58 TIN interview TIN 02-753, 17 November 2002.

59 TIN interview AM 3, 23 June 2003.

60 TIN interview TIN 03-1274, 16 October 2003, follow up of TIN 03-1264.

meeting with both leaders when she sang in front of them and other Party officials in 1959, and that she has been termed '*Cholma Tseten Dolma*, 'Tseten Dolma the whore' by some Tibetans.⁶¹ Obviously it cannot be proved or disproved that such a relationship took place, but the rumours show that at least some Tibetans have found a reason, whether true or false, to explain Tseten Dolma's extreme loyalty to the Chinese above and beyond belief in the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party, and have discredited her integrity. In other words, there is a sense that there must be some ulterior motive behind a Tibetan showing such loyalty to the Chinese.

The testimonies of many Tibetans also clearly demonstrate that although virtually all Tibetans have had to sing propaganda songs, this is certainly not necessarily an illustration of their loyalty to the Party. Pema Bhum, Sonam Dekyi, Lobsang Dekyi and Lochoe all give accounts of people singing traditional and 'counter-revolutionary' songs in private when they could get away with it during the Cultural Revolution, and Lobsang Dekyi also recalled receiving beatings when caught. Sonam Dekyi describes how Tashi Namgyal, the father of Ngawang Sangdrol, continued to sing Tibetan opera during the Cultural Revolution despite his knowledge that this would (and did) result in beatings.⁶² Lobsang Dekyi described how they took refuge in sad songs in private:

*We didn't have a right to express our moments of happiness, nor did we have the possibility to find comfort in our songs for even a minute at a time. There wasn't a normal song around, because whenever we sang, we always would sing songs with sad and hidden meanings.*⁶³

Apart from continuing to sing banned songs rather than the Party's choice of songs in private or even in a confrontational manner, Sonam Dekyi also described the lack of genuine feeling she witnessed in Tibetans singing revolutionary songs during the Cultural Revolution:

*There were songs sung in the form of praise and we had to sing them. However, people merely sang them, in their minds there was no willingness or gladness to sing them I think. [...] In our heart we didn't feel like singing and when they forced us to sing we didn't at all feel happy.*⁶⁴

Loyon similarly described his experience of the revolutionary songs while in a work camp during the Cultural Revolution:

During those times when the Chinese made us sing we felt nothing. We were forced to sing. We were compelled to sing and there was no choice [...]. I felt suffocated in my heart. We were not allowed to sing the songs that we wanted to sing but when we were forced to sing those [revolutionary] songs that we were not willing to sing it was a problem on top of problems. [...] They hoped

61 See Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy (forthcoming).

62 TIN interview TIN 03-775, 19 August 2003

63 TIN interview TIN 03-1316, 29 July 2003

64 TIN interview TIN 03-775, 19 August 2003

*that if the revolutionary songs of Mao Zedong and Marxism were put in the ears of the prisoners these would change their ideology of the world. However, their wish was not fulfilled. In front of the Chinese we said “May Mao Zedong live for thousands of years” but behind their back we said “May this beggar die a miserable death”.*⁶⁵

This gap between the public image of Tibetans singing in praise of China and their individual inclination is captured with particular clarity by Pema Bhum, who recalls an incident involving a teacher – one of those who were supposed to be enforcing the ban:

One night a few of us were walking back to campus (...). As we neared the school gate, we could hear a man walking towards us, singing lashay under his breath. So as not to scare him, we kept quiet. The man was walking on the right side of the road and nearly came upon us. We quickly crossed over to the left side of the street, but as we were passing, he stepped into the glow of a street lamp.

“Teacher Pe...!” one of us cried out. ...

*“Sailing an ocean, you must rely on a captain.
Making revolution, you must rely on Mao Zedong Thought. ...”*

*The love song of the man across the street suddenly switched into a popular revolutionary song. His voice was louder now than when he had been singing the lashay. He hastened out of the lamp’s dim light and disappeared into the dark, his revolutionary song still audible.*⁶⁶

While most Tibetans have largely complied with having to sing propaganda songs, although many of them reluctantly, the forcing of political prisoners to sing propaganda songs has provoked far more problematic reactions for the authorities. Propaganda songs played roles in inciting a number of demonstrations in Drapchi prison.⁶⁷ In an incident on *Losar* (Tibetan new year) 1997 in Drapchi prison, two prisoners sang a Tibetan freedom song challenging the song in praise of Mao that three other prisoners were singing.⁶⁸ On 1 May 1998, International Labour Day, criminal and political prisoners had to sing pro-Chinese songs in a flag-raising ceremony:

The programme began with prisoners singing ‘Socialism is Good’, followed a few minutes later by the raising of the Chinese flag as prisoners sang the Chinese national anthem. [...] slogan shouting began among the common criminals. Two men are alleged to have begun shouting pro-independence, pro-Dalai Lama slogans, as well as decrying the hoisting of China’s flag. One or

65 TIN interview TIN 03-1318, 11 August 2003

66 Bhum *Six Stars with a Crooked Neck: Tibetan Memoirs of the Cultural Revolution*: 107-108. Dharamsala, India: Tibet Times.

67 See Steve Marshall 2000 *Rukhag 3: The Nuns of Drapchi Prison*, published by TIN, for a detailed account of the cycles of dissent and repression which these singing incidents formed a part of.

68 This incident is described in more detail in chapter 5.

two ordinary criminals are reported to have scattered leaflets in the form of small slips of paper inscribed with hand-written slogans, which had been concealed beneath clothing. As soon as slogans were heard, male political prisoners joined in, and so did female political prisoners. The throng reportedly surged toward the flag dais, a move one of those present believed signalled the intent of the protestors to lower the flag, although the protest was suppressed before any such action could occur.⁶⁹

This demonstration was suppressed through force by the prison authorities that then tried to hold a successful flag raising ceremony again on 4 May 1998, International Youth Day.⁷⁰ Again there were protests by the prisoners, and again the demonstration was suppressed through force. On Wednesday 3 June 1998, the authorities again attempted to make prisoners sing patriotic Chinese songs, this time apparently just the female political prisoners. One of the prisoners at the time, Choeying Kunsang, recounted what happened:

They came [to our cell-blocks] carrying [Chinese song] books and told us: 'Your case of [misbehaviour] last time hasn't been finalised.' Then they told use to sing 12 different songs in Chinese and Tibetan. They were all songs like the national anthem and songs in praise of the Party. They gathered us in one large room and there we were made to sing. The political prisoners didn't sing at all. Not one of the political prisoners sang, but the ordinary prisoners sang. Then they told us, 'If you don't sing the Chinese songs, at least sing the Tibetan songs. You can't say that you can't sing these.' We told them that we wouldn't sing a single word. They then said, 'If you don't sing there is no other way' and made us stand outside in a line in the full sunlight. They kept us all in line in the sun and then took us each by turn into a room and questioned us about the reason we refused to sing. When they questioned us they beat us, using electric prods. We were weak and dizzy by the time we came out of the room.⁷¹

The women were further punished by making them stand outside in the sun for extended periods, culminating in the deaths of five of the nuns on 7 June 1998, when the nuns were given a half-day respite. It has not been possible to establish with certainty whether the deaths resulted directly from abuse or, as claimed by the Chinese authorities, from suicide.⁷² The female prison staff in charge of their unit, tutrang, tried to make them sing the songs. Choeying Kunsang continued:

All the tutrang are women. They told us, 'If you want to sing then go into this room and sing. If you don't want to sing then you can stand up until your sentence is finished.' We said, "We came here with our minds decided, we are not afraid to die, so we will stand". So that time we kept on standing up. We had to stand up from the morning, and during lunch we got ten minutes to go

69 Marshall 2000: 42

70 Rukhag 3 does not state that singing was involved in this incident.

71 In Marshall 2000: 49-50.

72 *ibid*: 50-54.

to the toilet. Then again we had to stand up till late in the evening. We were not allowed to touch those who [collapsed], we had to let them lie as they fell. At that time it was the hot season. We had to stand up like this each day, and then on [7 June] they gave us a free Sunday.⁷³

Without being able to interview Tibetans in Tibet about their reactions to current propaganda songs or the singing campaigns of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, it is impossible to estimate the extent to which they have taken propaganda messages on board, ignored them intentionally or unintentionally, or found ways of protesting against them. However, the evidence shows that no amount of singing or exposure to political songs is sure to change a person's political ideology. In some cases, the greater the exposure to the songs and pressure to sing, the stronger is the resistance, whether this is privately or openly expressed. While political songs appear effective in bringing people together and strengthening the passion of those who are already committed to the Party, the motherland, or Mao,⁷⁴ their effectiveness in gaining new recruits to the cause appears limited.

What then is the value of propaganda songs to the Chinese authorities? Are the authorities naïve in believing that through propaganda songs they are in fact changing the way Tibetans think? Although naivety may play a role, the importance of propaganda songs goes beyond ideological indoctrination, and ultimately is more about imposing control and displaying, through the resulting performance, the fact of that control. This is particularly clear in the aforementioned cases of forced singing of propaganda songs in prison and the ensuing cycles of protest and attempts to impose control. Former political prisoner Ngawang Sangdrol stated:

[The authorities] didn't have success [changing the minds of] any of the political prisoners. In a way someone could be perceived by their outward appearance as having changed their mind, but in reality [the authorities] weren't able to change people's minds. I don't think they actually think that they are able to succeed in that. [...] It is force. [One reason they do it] is that they want us to do what we don't want to do and secondly, they want to tell this to the outside world.⁷⁵

However, with some individuals ready to face any consequence of protest, it has not always been possible for the authorities to enforce and demonstrate control through propaganda songs. The prison authorities at Drapchi stopped making the prisoners sing the Chinese national anthem after the May 1998 protests.⁷⁶ A male ex-political prisoner from Drapchi reported that around 1993 the prison authorities gave up trying to make the political prisoners of Unit 5 sing 'Socialism is Good' with morning exercises because the prisoners continually refused to sing as a group. People were singled out and made to

73 *ibid*: 50

74 See, for example Vivian Wagner's article 'Songs of the Red Guards: Keywords set to music' http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/resources/working_paper/noframe_10b_song.htm

75 TIN interview AM 4, 5 January 2004.

76 TIN interview TIN 02-1219, 8 November 2002.

sing alone, and some did sing, fearing punishment, but the prison authorities gave up after about a year due to constant resistance. A group of nuns imprisoned in Gutsa prison from the late 1980s to the early 1990s also managed to avoid singing Chinese songs by claiming that they did not know them. Unlike many of the Drapchi prisoners, the authorities did not push them into further confrontation over this issue.⁷⁷ The nun and ex-long-term political prisoner Ngawang Sangdrol reported that she had managed to avoid ever singing a propaganda song in Tibet, despite spending over ten years in prison (in Gutsa and in Drapchi).

Indirect propaganda

While the explicit propaganda messages seem to have done little to change hearts and minds, the messages of the indirect forms of propaganda show more signs of being internalised. That Tibetans (and other minorities) love singing, are good at singing and engage in a lot of singing and dancing is the genuine view of most Chinese, and also of many Tibetans. This message of the minorities loving singing and dancing is easy to convey to at least the Chinese public since it is not a new idea but rather something that ties in with a range of long-standing Chinese ethnocentric ideas about the minorities. It also ties in with the 'New Age' spirituality and the search for 'meaning' in ethnic cultures that has swept the West and is now making its mark on China. The cover sleeve of Dadawa's much-criticised 1995 album *Sister Drum* reads:

Tibetans are a community noted for group dances and choral singing. An alien land filled even today with marvellous tales and legendary colour. Lacking the so-called 'individual' or 'individual consciousness', people there still live as one, according to the ancient custom. But to the entire world, the real society in which we exist, Tibetans are an 'individual' of its own unique characteristics, standing apart from the world, to the extent that they are incomparably special.⁷⁸

However, the singing and dancing image of the Tibetans and its implication of the tolerant state has also been accompanied by an unprecedented level of real tolerance for Tibetan non-religious culture since the 1980s. This includes genuine enthusiasm for Tibetan music at least in the form of sinified performances by Chinese-trained performers or certain genres of 'timeless' and 'history-less' (and hence politically unthreatening) folk music. It is probably due to these reasons that some Tibetans view the Chinese interest in Tibetan music as a sign of genuine interest and respect, and do not interpret it in political terms. For example, a young singer from Pema county in Golog prefecture, described the interest of Chinese officials in Tibetan songs in a particular restaurant she used to frequent:

Sometimes I went to meet [a friend] in a restaurant. Many Chinese civil servants, Chinese soldiers and many high-ranking people used to come in that

⁷⁷ TIN interview TIN 03-770, 28 March 2003.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Upton 2002: 103.

*restaurant. [...] When high-ranking officials came there, they greatly appreciated it when we sang Tibetan songs and said that they liked Tibetan songs. Further, they said they greatly appreciated Tibetan culture, Tibetan costume and Tibetan dialect. So when we sang Chinese songs they wanted us to sing Tibetan songs and not Chinese.*⁷⁹

When asked why the Chinese authorities liked to show Tibetan dances and songs, Tsering, a young singer from Sershul county, Sichuan, stated :

*I think Chinese people think Tibet has great scenery and landscape and therefore they must enjoy seeing our songs and dances.*⁸⁰

However, two other Tibetans saw the political agenda behind the Chinese government's pretended love for Tibetan music. A singer born in Hongyuan county, Sichuan, at first saw the prominence of Tibetans and other minorities such as the Mongolians on Chinese television as appreciation of these nationalities, saying "I thought the Chinese were propagating the Tibetan people and Mongolian people to the world". However, when asked why he thought the Chinese authorities did this he added:

*In my view, since our Dalai Lama's government outside Tibet tells the world that we Tibetans don't have freedom and that we Tibetans are suffering, the objective of the Chinese authorities [in showing Tibetan dances on television] is to show positive scenes in order to fight against [what the Dalai Lama's government says].*⁸¹

A Tibetan, aged about 40, who worked in Lhasa Song and Dance Troupe pointed to the marked contrast between the level of participation of Tibetans in music compared with politics:

*It is difficult for Tibetans to join in political campaigns in China, but in music competitions, the Tibetans can join in. The Chinese wouldn't invite the Tibetan leaders of the TAR to China in order to discuss how to manage Tibet. When a meeting has finished in China on Tibet then they will report what to do to the TAR through phone calls. However regarding art competitions, the Tibetans are always present.*⁸²

Although the extensive state sponsorship of (certain kinds of) minority arts and the current enthusiastic reports traditional and pop music may be effective in convincing Chinese, and also some Tibetans, in Tibet that the state is not destroying Tibetan culture, the propaganda aimed at Tibetans outside Tibet and their Western supporters usually backfires. While the dance troupe tours show that some kind of culture is alive in Tibet, the 'developed' and sinicised style of these troupes, particularly the large ones, simply

79 TIN interview TIN 02-1080, 20 March 2002.

80 TIN interview TIN 03-1082, 1 April 2003.

81 TIN interview TIN 02-753, 17 November 2002.

82 TIN interview TIN 03-1264, 3 August 2003.

consolidates the existing point of view of exiled Tibetans and Western supporters that real Tibetan culture has been destroyed in Tibet, and only sinicised forms exist.⁸³ For example, the journalist Peter Worthington of the Toronto Sun reported on a performance that took place in Toronto in September 2002 as a part of China Tibetan Culture Week:

Those [local Tibetans] who managed to see the performance said it was more Chinese than Tibetan – costumes modified to be Chinese, music faster than traditional Tibetan, words changed. All glorifying China's absorption of Tibetan people.

Namgyal Nangsetsang saw the show on Sept. 18 with a friend, and shouted out "Chinese propaganda!" She was dragged out of the theatre, and a Chinese security man in a dark suit punched her in the face and grinned. In the lobby she was flung to the ground and pummelled.⁸⁴

Many Tibetans and western supporters also criticise China for turning Tibetan culture into political propaganda. Upon publication of the aforementioned leaked document on external propaganda, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), for example, stated:

China will be hard pressed to contend that it is respecting Tibetan culture now that these documents have been made public. These documents make clear that Tibetan culture is being used as a tool for Beijing's political propaganda.

However, it is fair to say that Tibetans in exile also use music for conveying political statements. TIPA performances, for example, end with the raising of the Tibetan national flag and the Tibetan national anthem. New political lyrics are also composed for traditional songs. Figure 2 is a page from a songbook used in exile Tibetan schools. The lyrics of the song are:

*Let's return soon to Tibet!
Even though the Tibetans are the owners of Tibet
The Chinese have acted with shameless greed.
But we haven't lost our courage
Let's return soon to Tibet!
Those Chinese are such bullies!
Tibet will be completely free
Chinese – get out of Tibet!*

⁸³ These issues are discussed in chapter 6.

⁸⁴ 26 September 2002. Full article available on World Tibet Network News Archive <http://www.tibet.ca/english/index.html>.

