Chapter Five

Protest, perceptions and ambiguities

'The white cloud from the east is not a patch that is sewn
A time will come when the sun will emerge from the cloud and shine clearly'[1]

As we have seen, the Chinese state has used music for its propaganda purposes through vast scale singing campaigns, spectacular performances at festivals and its own specially trained troupes, all further magnified through secondary media reports and coverage. However, politically motivated singing is not exclusively for those with power and money at their disposal, but is an option open to anyone with a voice and the will to use it, whether rich or poor, educated or illiterate. In this way, singing becomes a medium of protest, an expression of identity and solidarity for those without resources or political freedom.

The power of singing as a tool for protest lies most significantly in the fact that the voice is most difficult to restrict. A person's physical freedom can be curtailed relatively easily through imprisonment, but actually silencing them is not always so straightforward. While the fear of imprisonment and probable maltreatment is enough to discourage most people from singing protest songs in any situation where they may get caught, some Tibetans have been prepared to use their voices for political confrontation. A song composed by a group of nuns in prison, 'Physical Freedom' *(Rang lus ki rang wang)*, laments their captivity and the Chinese presence in Tibet, and demonstrates the enduring power of the voice and song as a means of expression and protest:

O fellow Tibetan brethren,

Do not distracted by others; listen to me,

I've a tale to tell for you all.

Let not your ears be distracted; pay heed to me.
Formerly, Tibet was free and independent

1 This is one of the most famous lyrics of Tibetan nationalist songs, dating back at least as far as the Cultural Revolution. The full text of this song is given below.

But now, the Chinese have usurped our bodies
Formerly, Tibet used to be a land of religion,

But now the Chinese have turned it into a prison
The Chinese (let them die a miserable death)

Have put all the Tibetans in a prison ground

To eat, there is rubbish

They beat us perpetually

Although they beat us harshly

The Tibetans never become discouraged.

This is for the sake of Buddhism.

This is for the sake of Buddhism.

Protest singing is found across Tibet at grass roots level, in prisons, and more surprisingly, in commercial entertainment venues and on pop music albums; it may be private, discrete or confrontational. However, with the potential consequences of voicing opinions that counter those of the Party, songs with explicit, slogan-like lyrics that protest Chinese rule are very rare in today's Tibet. Rather, the vast majority of songs expressing (in Tibetan and Chinese language) dissatisfaction with, and resistance against, the Chinese state work through ambiguities and metaphors, suggesting political meanings rather than making political statements. The necessity for ambiguity, a reaction to political repression, has led to manifold interpretations of songs. Many so-called political Tibetan songs have become political more through listeners' own 'readings' of them, rather than through the explicit meaning of the lyrics. As a result there are many different interpretations of a given Tibetan song, just as there are divergent perceptions as to whether or not it is 'political'. Songs intentionally expressing or, for that matter, perceived as expressing views at odds with the Chinese state, make up the most significant genres of song in contemporary Tibet.

Songs of protest and dissatisfaction

Defining and imposing boundaries

The official line on Tibetan culture and identity expressed through speeches and other forms of propaganda defines what is politically acceptable and what is unacceptable – what is seen by the state as threatening. This makes people aware of the boundaries, but at the same time demarcates potential material for protest, providing a sense of where and how to push the boundaries. Just as the policy regarding Tibetan culture and identity has been through drastic changes during half a century of Chinese Communist Party rule in Tibet, so has the kind of material used for protest. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, singing any form of traditional Tibetan music was forbidden, and traditional music became highly politicised and potential material for protest. Nowadays, it is only the lyrical content of songs that is restricted – it is forbidden to refer to the past or future independence of Tibet, to criticise Chinese rule and policy, and to praise the Dalai Lama.

Therefore, faith in and praise of the Dalai Lama, especially as the leader of the Tibetan people, sadness at his absence and hopes for his return, are the most common themes found in Tibetan protest songs. Others talk of sadness at the state of Tibet, the suffering of Tibetans and the Chinese as invaders, looters and destroyers of the country. Given the potential consequences of expressing views that contradict those of the state, it is, not surprisingly, unusual to find these themes expressed explicitly in songs composed in Tibet. However, songs that suggest such meanings through metaphorical language are widespread. Even more widespread are patriotic songs that praise the beauty of Tibet's landscape and express pride in the Tibetan people. Such songs were first made famous by Dadon, and were key to her outstanding popularity. These songs exist in a particularly 'grey area' of the politics of Tibetan identity in today's China. As the PRC has embraced an approach of 'unity in diversity' towards the cultures of the minority nationalities since the end of the Cultural Revolution, pride in one's nationality and distinctive identity is acceptable and something the Chinese authorities encourage, albeit in a highly controlled way. Yet such songs of Tibetan national pride can easily give rise to feelings of cultural and ethnic pride and yearnings towards political independence in the minds of some listeners. This, however, depends heavily on the way they are interpreted, as it is widely acknowledged by Tibetans inside and outside Tibet.

With the extensive and widening reach of the Party's propaganda network and the intolerance and severe punishment of dissidence, politically sensitive material in songs, drama and literature is primarily controlled through self-censorship. Most people know the limits and choose not to push them, or at least not in a manner they cannot get away with. Beyond self-censorship, song lyrics are also checked by music producers (which may or may not be a part of government institutions) before they are released on cassette or VCD. The songs that slip through both these levels of censorship to be released on albums are largely songs with ambiguous or cryptic metaphorical references to political themes. However, a surprising number of these are seemingly clear in political

meaning to many Tibetans, and are in circulation at the level of professional and recorded music as well as amateur music making. The authorities appear to turn a blind eye to a lot of this material and only restrict songs if they become very popular and their political meanings are recognised by many. Even then, they are not banned outright, such as through confiscating cassettes, CDs and VCDs, but rather their performance is restricted in large gatherings of Tibetans, such as *Nangma* bars or major festivals where these songs could have a serious impact on security. There are also repercussions for singers and songwriters who are seen to have written or performed political songs. At least one singer, Karma Tendar, was banned from releasing any more music albums, yet he still performs live in *Nangma* bars in Lhasa. Yadong, Dube and more recently, Chungshol Dolma, are also rumoured to have been questioned by the authorities about their songs, and at least two of Yadong's Chinese language songs have been restricted.

Creating a grey area: ambiguity and interpretation

As discussed in the previous chapter on state propaganda, political messages do not necessarily reach their destinations in the form that the senders would desire, and can easily be missed, misunderstood or subverted, depending on the listener and the listening context. With Tibetan protest songs, interpretation is even more significant because unlike in propaganda songs, the intended messages are rarely expressed clearly, but rather tend to be couched in metaphor and elliptical poetic language. While elliptical language is a feature of traditional Tibetan poetry, its use in modern Tibetan songs and literature is a direct consequence of political repression. Opinions that counter those of the state are necessarily driven 'underground' into ambiguous and cryptic forms. Similarly ambiguous language is used in the many Chinese language songs composed by Tibetans. The high level of ambiguity in many songs composed by Tibetans often makes it difficult to clearly identify whether or not a song is meant to be political, and it is easy for people to miss the political message if they are not themselves politically inclined. Perhaps more importantly, it is easy for singers and listeners to deny that there is any political message if they are questioned, and virtually impossible to prove their denial to be false. A Tibetan, who edited a literary magazine in Amdo explained the covert expression of political meanings through poetic language:

> *In our Tibetan poetry we have 'ornamental poetry' with* [covert] *meanings (duedzod kyi gyan). In this kind of poetry you can write in such a manner where you know the meaning of what you have written whereas others won't know the in-depth meaning. For example, if in the compositions someone talks about Ama, 'Mother', it personifies His Holiness the Dalai Lama. People are able to write in such a way for journals. They are not allowed to write openly on freedom/independence. In duedzod kyi gyan you can write 'Mother, you are in Lhasa, I miss you. Your children are going through a lot of struggle and hardship. Please have mercy on us and come down to us'. Suppose people accuse you of having written an article or poem with a political statement, then you can give your own explanation.*[2]

2 TIN interview TIN 03-1079, 8 April 2003

There are also examples of songs which probably contain no intended political meaning but which come to be interpreted in a political way, as people read their own points of view, experiences and emotions into an ambiguous text. The most famous example of this is probably *Aku Pema*, 'Uncle Pema', a song from Amdo which has become widely recognised as a political song in exile and also to some extent in central Tibet, but was almost certainly not intended as such. It is probably more accurate to describe it as a 'politicised song' than a 'political song'. It certainly contains no clear political message, but many people interpreted the song as an address to the Dalai Lama. That the Dalai Lama could be referred to by a title as mundane as 'Uncle' has been seen as implausible. One Amdo Tibetan also reported that friends of Palgon, the artist who had composed the song's music and lyrics, had stated that in fact the song was composed for a friend called Pema who was about to go away, and that it was not intended as a political song. *Aku Pema* was banned for a while in *nangma* bars in Lhasa,[3] and an interviewee from Golog reported that someone was imprisoned for a year for singing it.[4] Allegedly the song is no longer restricted in Tibet.

Oh Uncle Padma!

Oh mighty Eagle adorned with a
conch-white stripe!
If you soar up heavenwards, you adorn
the azure sky, and
If you descend earthwards, you
gladden the craggy mountains.
And, your absence makes the craggy
ledges bereft of any life!

Oh Uncle Padma!

Duck with the golden rosary
If you fly out of the water, you adorn
the meadows,
X If you swim in the water, you gladden
the water's spirits.
And, your absence makes the lake
bereft of life and spirit!

3 TIN interview TIN 03-1084, 28 April 2003.
4 TIN interview TIN 03-1080, 20 March 2003.

Oh Uncle Padma!

Oh handsome Youth, adorned with
conch-white teeth like a tiger!
If you go way, you are a credit to your
fellow townsfolk, and
If you come this way, you are a star
amongst your peers.
And, your absence makes my heart
bereft of love and meaning!

One Tibetan also claimed that Yadong's song *Choeten Karpo*, 'White Stupa' (originally in Chinese), which is currently banned in *nangma* bars because it is seen as praising the Dalai Lama symbolised as the 'white stupa', was not intended as a political song. Rather, it was commissioned for advertising purposes by a butter manufacturer called *Choeten karpo*. The Dalai Lama is traditionally symbolised by the snow lion and the sun, yet the sun has also been used to symbolise Mao and the 'light' of the Chinese Communist Party. The Dalai Lama is also commonly symbolised as parents or a mother, a sweetheart and a range of birds including the cuckoo and the *jolmo*, who's 'sweet song' can represent his words and wisdom. However, Tibetan poetry's traditional leaning towards metaphor and elliptical expression and the highly repressive climate have led to a situation where virtually anything that is praised and venerated in a song can be taken to symbolise the Dalai Lama. Similarly, a song of sadness can stand for the sadness and suffering of the Tibetan people who have been scattered across the world and separated from friends, relatives and loved ones, and most importantly, the sadness for the Dalai Lama's absence. There are also a range of Tibetan songs that praise the Tibetan landscape and unique character and culture that the Chinese authorities would nowadays look favourably upon, seeing this as a celebration of *China's* Tibet, the 'beautiful and strange land'. However, it would be just as possible for dissident Tibetans to interpret the song as praise of what they believe to be *their* Tibet.

This ambiguity and symbolic interpretation of lyrics makes it practically impossible for the Chinese authorities to effectively censor Tibetan songs, without banning references to the sun, birds, parents, love, longing, the sadness at hard times and the hope for happier times, the looking forward to meeting a long lost friend, the praise of Tibet's beauty, or even a cloud in the sky. Although possible in principle, this would return Tibet to a Cultural Revolution level of censorship, where all that was expressed was explicit praise of Mao, the motherland and the socialist revolution. This would be very difficult to justify politically in today's PRC. With ambiguous songs, censorship will always remain a step behind, because what could be perceived by the Party to be undesirable political views are often more in people's minds than concretely articulated, or expressed in ways impossible to restrict such as applauding particular songs more than others at performances or buying particular recordings and not others.

Whereas the propaganda songs of the Chinese authorities explicitly promote the Party line and enforce and demonstrate control, the ambiguous new songs sung by Tibetans buy a certain freedom and evade control by relying on the creative interpretation of listeners, which, by nature, cannot be censored. The potential for political interpretation in such songs creates a grey area in a political climate that requires clear-cut political correctness. This blurring of boundaries is itself a form of protest or resistance. The ambiguous songs from inside Tibet also contrast with many of the songs created in exile, which tend to be explicit calls for Tibetan independence, praise for the Dalai Lama and so on. It is widely recognised in exile and in Tibet that the standard of poetry in Tibetan songs from Tibet is far higher than in those from exile, and it has also been recognised that the richness of the poetry in the songs from Tibet is in part due to the political repression that necessitates symbolic expression.

Tibetans inside and outside Tibet are highly aware of the ambiguity of intention and meaning of most so-called political songs from Tibet and many acknowledge the fact that certain songs are only political for those receptive to or searching for political meanings. One exile Tibetan stated that you can get *"paranoid"* thinking that there is political meaning behind songs which were not intended to be political, as you try to interpret the metaphor and elliptical language of Tibetan songs – as was probably the case with *Aku Pema*. A young Tibetan former government official from the TAR explained his own way of listening to Tibetan songs and talked with great clarity of this issue of intended meaning and received meaning in Tibetan songs:

> *In Tibet, when we would listen to songs and play songs, we wouldn't think or expect anything political at all. The thought itself wouldn't occur, we would look for nice songs, and we were interested in nice songs which we would be able to sing ourselves while being with friends or family. We wouldn't think anything political about that. We didn't recognise any political meanings at all in songs. If you really look closely at the texts of some of the singers that had a particular loyalty to our nationality, such as Dadon, then you would be able to discern some political meanings. But not all the performers are like that.*
>
> *Some performers put a lot of covert political meanings in their songs, but the majority of singers don't do this. It depends on the singer, on the intention of the singer, and the emotions behind his or her songs. But when this person does sing something that can be seen as a statement of being a separate nationality, a statement expressing the feeling of being a certain nationality, then if the receiver, the listener, doesn't take an interest, whether it is sung in Chinese or Tibetan, then the message doesn't reach the recipient and in a way thus loses its political message or significance.*
>
> *Whether a song is a political statement or not depends on what the listener makes of it. If a singer sings about the pastures, the yaks and the memory of his mother, whether he did sing this intentionally as a statement of nationality*

and perhaps a covert reference to the Dalai Lama or not, if the listener does see these things in the song, then this song becomes a political statement, if not for the singer then at least for the listener.

The same is true for a Chinese listener. That listener can recognise a political meaning in a song or that person can totally fail to do so. For example we used to spend a lot of time with Chinese soldiers in army camps near our village and we used to play [tapes of] songs performed by Tibetans, many of which songs were in Chinese language, and many of which can be recognised by the listener as containing political statements of some sort, though covert. But these soldiers didn't take any interest in any of this so therefore they also didn't identify or acknowledge any of these possible political interpretations; so then these songs don't function as political statements to these particular listeners.[5]

Above all, the ambiguity of Tibetan songs and the particularly important role of interpretation reveal both the extent of political repression in Tibet and its limits. While censorship can restrict messages known to counter the views of the state, the oblique nature of song lyrics leads the listener into the area of the unknown, where they must delve into their own thoughts and experiences for possible meaning, and the state has no direct or immediate control over the area of people's minds. As the authorities come to recognise certain metaphors and restrict them (the snow lion, for instance, is widely recognised), then new metaphors may be found. 'Uncle Pema' and 'The White Stupa' may be examples of this – or they may not be.

Song texts

A selection of political songs by Tibetans is presented in this section in their original language and English translation. The songs presented here are limited to those composed in Tibet, although political songs, using usually explicit language, dominate the popular music of the Tibetan exiles. The choice has also been limited by concerns for the safety of current singers in Tibet, so the songs presented are largely those of singers that have left Tibet (such as Dadon), are deceased (such as Jampa Tsering), songs that have already been banned or restricted, and songs whose political meanings are particularly ambiguous, arguably more a matter of interpretation than the intentions of the lyric writer. However, suffice it to say that there are a great many songs currently being produced in Tibet that have lyrics at least suggestive of political meanings.

The sources of some of the explicitly political songs are unknown, since they are not released on commercial recordings in Tibet but are passed on orally. They move between Tibet and exile, and political prisoners, ex-prisoners and non-prisoners, being modified as they pass between these different communities.

5 TIN interview TIN 03-764, 4 April 2003.

Explicitly political songs

Some of the most famous explicitly political songs from Tibet are those recorded by the 14 nuns from Drapchi prison in 1993. The lyrics of all fourteen songs are given in Appendix A. The lyrics of these songs are a mixture of newly composed phrases and phrases from older songs, including protest songs composed by other prisoners, or more rarely non-prisoners, known to communities inside and outside prisons and in exile. Four of these songs overlap considerably with nine songs similarly composed by the nuns Lobsang Choedron, Phuntsog Lamdrol, Phuntsog Tendrol, and Ngawang Choedron, held in Gutsa prison and Trisam Re-education through Labour Camp in the 1980s and early 1990, showing the high degree of common repertoire of political songs and the recycling of lyrics. Also, both sets of songs have many phrases in common. The following song, *Gyalkhab kyi Sogtsa*, 'Life Blood of the Country', is sung in slightly different versions by both groups of nuns. The version given here is that of the nuns from Gutsa and Trisam. It refers to the Dalai Lama in person, using his name Tenzin Gyatso, and also alludes to him through the metaphor of a mother. The nuns explained how this song *"not only refers to our mothers but it also means the life essence of Tibet which is His Holiness the Dalai Lama"*.6 The Tibetan lyrics and English translations of all the songs of Lobsang Choedron, Phuntsog Lamdrol, Phuntsog Tendrol, and Ngawang Choedron are given in Appendix B, and an account of the singing of both sets of nuns is given below.

O Land of Snows, Land of Snows, my beloved Mother,
The life essence of our Mother, Tenzin Gyatso,
My 'root' lama and we have been separated by the red Chinese.
O Buddhas of the ten directions, for the sake of the Tibetan people
Offering blood and tears, bearing suffering religiously.
The Buddhas of the ten directions

Consider my sincere words

O Land of Snows, Land of Snows, my beloved country
The life of our country is religious and political freedom
My 'root' Lama, he, the 'wish-fulfilling jewel'
If the six millions of Tibetans unite as one

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

A time will come when the sun will emerge from the cloud and shine clearly
A time will come when the sun will emerge from the cloud and shine clearly

A selection of other explicit protest songs from inside Tibet are given here:

1. *Tso Ngonpo* (Lake Kokonor), lyricist unknown

Various versions of this song are known, and it in part dates back at least to the late 1980s or early 1990s, at which time references to the Dalai Lama would have been tolerated. The third stanza of the song is the most political, directly mentioning independence and the Dalai Lama. The terms used are 'the victorious one', *gyal wa*, which is widely seen as referring to the Dalai Lama, although it can be used for any 'root guru', and 'the sovereign protector', *gongsa kyabgon*, which is a title for the Dalai Lama. A recording of the first two stanzas of the song has been heard on a 2001/2002 CD from a singer from Amdo, and a version that calls more explicitly for independence was sung by a group of teenage boys as a protest in 1993. The song with all three stanzas was heard in Lhasa around 1995. The song was also widely known in exile amongst new arrivals from Tibet in the early 1990s, and amongst the wider exile community. The explicit nature of the last stanza makes it likely that it was composed in exile, or alternatively by political prisoners in Tibet. However, it has not been possible to confirm this.

The Blue Lake [Kokonor Lake] abounds in golden fish.
Golden-eyed fish thrive in the crystal clear Lake,
And their golden fins develop because of the Lake.
The Blue Lake is the parent of parents, the parent of parents. The Blue Lake is the parent of parents.

The northern grasslands abound in sheep,

Cattle and sheep thrive on green pastures,

And their fat and sheen improve because of the pastures.
The 'Cogon grass' is the parent of parents, the Parent of parents. The 'Cogon grass' is the parent of parents.

Many Tibetans, both in Tibet and India

Study for the sake of Tibetan independence.

Tibetan independence will be because of the 'Victorious One'.

'The Sovereign Protector' is the parent of parents, the parent of parents. The 'Sovereign Ruler' is the parent of parents.

4. *Lhasa tsongpa marey*, 'Lhasa is Not Sold' (lyricist unknown)

This is a well-known protest song, which is said to have been composed in Lhasa. It was never released on cassette or publicly performed, since it openly praises the Dalai Lama, but circulated at private gatherings in Tibet during the 1990s. It also reached exile, where it has been popular amongst new arrivals from Tibet and Tibetans born in exile.

Lhasa is not sold, India is not bought

It is not that 'The Victorious One, Tenzin Gyatso, is without a place to live
His place of residence, the Ganden palace, is flourishing more than before

Ah! After three or four years, the time will arise to see [you] again

To Dharamsala in India

[We] went for pilgrimage

Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatso,

Sitting on the golden throne,

On both the right and left sides of the throne

Lotus flowers blossom

The brightness of the lotus flower

Shines all over the world

Ah! After three or four years, the time will arise to see [you] again

5. *Lha chig gi dzamling kyobno*, 'The Single Deity Who Protects the World', sung by Tsering.

The single deity who protects the world

Is the victorious guardian Tenzin Gyatso!

The single light that brightens up the world

Is the beam of the glorious sun in the sky!

The single sound that reverberates all around

Is the roar of the turquoise dragon of the South!

6. *Kyabgon tenzin gyatso*, 'The Guardian Protector Tenzin Gyatso', composed and sung by Tsering.

The guardian protector Tenzin Gyatso,

Your benedictions, like the sun's golden rays,

Though Invisible from the vastness of space,

Shines forth in the Land of Snows.

The guardian protector Tenzin Gyatso,

From inside the Land of Snows,

Long have we waited for you,

Now, the day of your audience has dawned

The flourishing of the Buddha dharma,

Augurs joy and peace to sentient beings.

The fulfilment of the wishes in this lifetime,

Augurs happiness and prosperity for Tibet.

Songs with 'clear', probable and possible political meanings

What is 'clear', probable or possible is debatable – the following comments represent interpretations gathered from Tibetans, but are not presented as a final opinion, just possible opinions that point to the ways in which songs can convey political meanings and the ways in which they can be, and are, interpreted.

1. *Tso Ngonpo*, 'Blue Lake' – original poem by Dondrub Gyal, sung by many singers, including Dadon

Possibly the most famous Tibetan nationalist song is *Tso Ngonbo*, 'Blue Lake' (same title, but not the same song as above), with music by Chopathar set to Dondrub Gyal's famous poem. According to Tsering Shakya, in this song, the famous 'blue lake' or Lake Kokonor in north-eastern Tibet is used as a metaphor for the Tibetan people, hence the image of the freezing of the lake implying the suffering of the Tibetans under Chinese rule. *Tso Ngon* refers not just to Lake Kokonor but also to the entire region of northeastern Tibet, giving the song a powerful Tibetan nationalism rooted in the land. Furthermore, 'Bearing witness to history' is taken as referring to Tibet as a separate country from China.[7]

Although entirely metaphorical in expression, its nationalistic implications were quickly recognised by Tibetans and it became widely popular in the early 1980s. Surprisingly, this song does not seem to have been restricted in Tibet, despite the fact that it was widely read in political terms, and it continues to be sung in Tibet. It was included in the last cassette Dadon released before leaving Tibet in 1992, and more recently has been included in recordings by the singer Dechen Wangmo and also the famous Amdo *dranyen* and mandolin player Palgon.

Aima! Blue Lake, Blue Lake, Blue Lake

Legacy of the nationality

Glory of the land of the ancestors

When the waves surge the geese are happy

Blue Lake! When the edges of the blue lake freeze the geese are saddened

7 Unpublished document

Aima! You are the witness of history

Blue Lake, you are the hope of the nationality

You are the hope of happiness and future life,

Blue Lake, happiness of the motherland,

Guardian of the nationality

When Blue Lake is frozen over, the golden-eyed fish go under the lake

Blue Lake, when the edges of the Blue Lake freeze up, the clean, white sheep are happy

Aima! You are the happiness of the present,

Blue Lake, [you] are the hope of the future

You are the owner of this world, you are the legacy of the nationality,

Blue Lake, Blue Lake

2. *Sharchog trinsang karpo gyabba'i lhanpa marey,* 'The White Cloud in the East is not a Sewn Patch'

This couplet is said to have been composed prior to the 1950s, where it was generally expressive of suffering and the hope that it would lift. It has come to be understood more specifically as referring to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, and the hope that it will end. It is found in many Tibetan songs in exile, as well as resistance songs composed inside Tibet, such as 'Looking Out from Gutsa', *Gutsai' nangnay taypay*, and 'Looking Out from

Drapchi', *Dabchi nang nay taypay*, composed by the nuns imprisoned in Gutsa and Drapchi prisons respectively (see Appendices A and B).

	The white cloud from the east is not a patch that is sewn *A time will come when the sun will emerge from the cloud and shine clearly*

Dadon's songs have become widely recognised as carrying political meanings. Her profile as a patriotic Tibetan artist was further enhanced when she left Tibet in 1992, denouncing Chinese rule as she arrived in exile and openly engaging in political activities. Initially many exiles looked down on her singing as 'corrupted' due to its Chinese influence, although the quality of the lyrics was always admired, but following her defection and the publicising of her political stance, she is now admired as a truly patriotic Tibetan.

3. *Drug tra drogshing* 'Dragon Roar' – Dadon

Many Tibetans identify this song as strongly nationalistic, although some see the political allusions only as apparent if searched for. The song is actually a 'cover' version of a Chinese song written by Deng Lijun, which was translated into Tibetan by Dadon. The Yellow River, mentioned in the text, was also changed to the Tibetan *Tsangpo (Brahmaputra)* to adapt it to the Tibetan context.[8]

The political reading of the Tibetan song sees it as expressing the deep-seated and ancient attachment of the Tibetan people to their land, and the loyalty to the land of thousands of generations of Tibetans. It also refers to the exile government as maintaining that loyalty. The song calls on people not to give up, weeping, at defeat, and not to lose courage. It also refers to a *"place of much suffering"*, which is easily read as Tibet. Finally, the song calls for the Tibetan people to arise from sleep and to cry out.

While the original Chinese song would not have been seen as having anything whatsoever to do with the Tibetan situation, the meaning of the Tibetan translation of the song is powerfully political and nationalistic for many Tibetans, encapsulating many aspects of the Tibetans situation, the loss of their own land, their suffering, and the call to rise up. The fact that this is a Tibetan translation of a Chinese song might explain why the Chinese authorities did not identify the weight of its potential political meaning.

8 Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy (forthcoming) 'Women in performing arts: Portraits of six contemporary singers': 24, in Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik (eds.) *Women in Tibet: Past and present*. London/New York: Hurst and Co./Columbia University Press.

The water that we drink

Is from the common river of Samsaric life.

The path that we tread together,

Is the hand-carved trail of our Ancestors.

The legacy of a thousand generations,

Is preserved and propagated in exile.

In the prophetic counsel of our forebears,

We can withstand privations,

Though tears come easily,

We must never surrender or give up.

Whilst in the land steeped with sorrow,

Where no traces of our past glory is visible,

Each year passed in suffering and sorrow,

Exhorts us to look back with painful longing.

Oh Great Turquoise Dragon of Samsara,

The appointed time to awaken from slumber

Is here and now, in our time,

Roar and thunder, roar and thunder, roar and thunder,

Traverse the heavenly realms!

4. *Riwo riwo Jomolangma,* 'Mount Everest' – Dadon

This song has a strong political meaning and explicitly refers to the Tibetan exiles, the powerful love between Tibetans inside and outside Tibet, and the hope that they will be united. It asks the Yarlung Tsangpo river, which runs into India where it becomes the Brahmaputra, to send a message to the Tibetans living in India. In its mention of the Tibetan exiles and the longing for their return, the song also clearly addresses the Dalai Lama in saying that Tibetans in Tibet keenly await his return. The release of a song with such a clear reference to the Tibetan exiles in Tibet is surprising.

Mount Everest *(Jomolangma),*
unwavering

The love of those Tibetans at home
and those away from home is firmer
than [the mountain] *Doje Drag*
To gather together, it would be so
happy to be able to gather together

The love of those Tibetans at home
and those away from home is firmer
than Doje Drag

The river Yarlung Tsangpo, please send
a message [to]
Our own brothers and sisters in exile -
there is no way we can forget you

To gather together, it would be so
happy to be able to gather together

Our own brothers and sisters in exile,
there is no way we can forget you

Beautiful fatherland, country of Tibet

Tibetan brothers and sisters, beloved
from our hearts
Come to greet us carrying the *A Shi*

ceremonial scarf, we are here waiting
for you to come

To gather together, it would be so
happy to be able to gather together

Come to greet us carrying the *A Shi*
ceremonial scarf, we are here waiting
for you to come

5. *Naychog phayul Lhasa*, 'Celestial Lhasa', Dadon

This song makes a clear reference to the rule of Tibet by Tibetans in the second to last line with the phrase *rang yul nang kyong*, 'those inside the country should rule the country'. The rest of the song, however, seems to be a praise of Lhasa's beauty, patriotic, but not crossing the line of permitted expression. This political meaning was initially only noticed by politically minded and more educated Tibetans. However, after Dadon left Tibet, and the government declared her songs political, it became widely perceived as political.[9]

Beautiful is Lhasa, the sacred
pilgrimage place of my native land.
The splendid, heart-warming Potala
Palace
A crown resplendent with the Precious
Jewel,
A crown bestowed upon this universe

I sing this song of auspiciousness.

Beautiful is the Land of Snows, the
sacred pilgrimage place, my native
land.
The pride of the good-natured Tibetans
is richly flourishing,
Diligently engaged in inculcating all
kinds of knowledge,
Single-minded in the self-governance
of our own land.
I sing this song of auspiciousness.

9 TIN interview TIN 03-764, 4 April 2003.

6. *Cha khuyug*, 'The Cuckoo Bird' – Dube

Dube is another singer commonly perceived as singing songs with Tibetan nationalist content, and is rumoured to have been in trouble with the authorities. This song, originally sang by Dube around the mid 1990s, expresses an explicit message of national pride and a wish for Tibet to reach its potential. This in itself does not transgress current limits of political acceptability in Tibet. However, the song also can be seen as being addressed to the Dalai Lama in two of its stanzas, thereby implying that the Dalai Lama is the holder of the national pride of the Tibetans and expressing an aspiration for his return. The linking of the Dalai Lama with the sense of Tibetan pride and hope rests on the address of each of the three verses of the song. The first verse addresses the 'sweet voiced blue cuckoo'. The blue cuckoo is often used as a metaphor for the Dalai Lama since it is seen as the king of birds in Tibet, and closely associated with the best season in Tibet, and the sweet voice of the bird is seen as the wisdom of the Dalai Lama. In this song the blue cuckoo is said to come from 'Mon in the South', which may strengthen the association with the present Dalai Lama, as the 5th Dalai Lama was from Mon, and the present Dalai Lama escaped into exile through Mon. However, it is the last stanza that most clearly implies the Dalai Lama through the image of the snow lion, and the prayer for the snow lion's long life. Again, different opinions exist as to the clarity of the political message of this song.

Oh Cuckoo bird, blessed with
melodious voice, Oh yes,
Though you're from the land of Mon in
the South,
You sing your sweet song in the land of
Tibet,
Auguring the realisation of the Tibetan
people's aspirations. It's auspicious.

Oh Tiger, blessed with such
magnificent red stripes, Oh yes,
Though you're from the deep green
woods of Gyazong forest,
You left your ferocity and courage in
the land of Tibet,
Auguring the indomitable courage of
the Tibetan people. It's auspicious.

Oh Snow-lion, blessed with such
magnificent turquoise manes, Oh yes,
Though you're from the white, snowy
peaks

You left your imprints, loyalty and good fortune in the land of Tibet,
May your life be long and successful without impediments. It's auspicious.

7. *Dranjung dang dranchung, Ri de himalaya*, 'I Miss You and Long for You, Oh, Mountain of the Himalaya', sung by Jampa Tsering

This song carries a political message through its description of someone across the Himalayas (i.e. in India or Nepal) missing the Tibetan homeland, thereby strongly evoking the exile community in general and the Dalai Lama in particular. The sense of waiting particularly implies the exile situation, that the subject of the song is only unwillingly separated from the homeland and their fellow Tibetans, longing to return.

O Himalayan mountain range, move aside awhile, if you please.
The majestic Potala Palace is what I dearly wish to see.

I fervently long for you, whether day or night, I long for you
Oh native land, 'Roof of the World', whether day or night, I long for you.

This water, the water of the Ganges, don't murmur and splash like that,
The peal of Tsuglag Khang's bells in the holy city, is what I long to hear.

I fervently long for you, whether day or night, I long for you
My brethren of same flesh and blood, I long for you day and night!

8. *Cha chig yinna samchung*, 'I Wish I Were a Bird' – Jampa Tsering

Jampa Tsering's song *Cha chig yin na sam chung* is an example of a song with no explicit meaning and no obvious metaphoric meaning. It is a song expressing a sense of loss at being separated from one's homeland, which is a theme also in traditional Tibetan songs. Whether this is interpreted in a traditional, non-political way of someone leaving their native place in Tibet for another area of Tibet, or seen as an expression of the sadness the Tibetan exiles and the Dalai Lama suffer being separated from their homeland – because of China's occupation of Tibet – depends on the listener's personal experience and level of politicisation.

I wish I were a bird, I wish I were a tiny bird,

So that I could fly away to my far away native land.

To some foreign land I shall not go, for the days there seem longer than a year. Actually, it's not the days that are long, but just that I'm so far from my homeland.

Leaving behind my happy homeland
I've been fated to live in a foreign land.
Separation from my kind parents is the karma of this little boy.

The cawing of the raven evokes feelings of great sadness.
To check how sad I am, Just look at my glimmering eyes.

Through drifting snow and fog, the gimo bird's mournful song echoes.
Hasten there, O divine *gongmo* bird, and cheer up the *gimo* as best as you can.

Seeing the river go tumbling downhill, I
wished it could flow upwards.
Thinking of my kind and loving parents,
I wished they would live long.

9. *Lhasae mon dun shu* 'Lhasa Prays and Longs for You' – singer unknown

This song tells of the beauty of Lhasa and welcomes visitors arriving there. However, aspects of the language and lyrics of the song hint that the song is being addressed not just to any visitor, but to the most honoured and longed for visitor of all, the Dalai Lama. The greeting used to welcome the visitor uses highly honorific language, suitable only for a very important guest such as a Lama or a high official. Furthermore, this visitor is one that Lhasa 'prays and longs' for, strongly evoking the Dalai Lama as the most conspicuous absence in modern Lhasa.

Lhasa, Lhasa, Lhasa, Lhasa!

My beloved native land where the
Kyichu river gently flows.

Eyeing the snow mountain, yonder,

What joy, may it keep increasing
O, what joy, may it keep increasing! O,
turn of good fortune!

Lofty snow peaks bow in respect,
welcoming and guiding you back.
The shimmering blue water of the
Kyichu
offers you *khatags* in boundless joy.
Your Exalted Highness, please come to
Lhasa.

Lhasa prays and longs for You.

Lhasa, Lhasa, Lhasa, Lhasa, where the *Kyichu* river gently flows.

The Lhasa girls sing hearty songs of welcome.

What joy, may it keep increasing!

O yes, what joy, may it keep increasing!

O yes, turn of good fortune!

The Lhasa girls sing rapturous songs of delight and welcome.
Pray, this delicious *chang* be drunk in one go, drunk in one go.

Your Exalted Highness, please come to Lhasa.

Lhasa prays and longs for You.

Your Exalted Highness, please come to Lhasa.

Lhasa prays and longs for You.

10. *Zou chu Xi ma la ya* 'Leaving the Himalayas' – Chungshol Drolma

This song sung by Chungshol Drolma is rumoured to have got her into trouble with the authorities. There is no explicitly political message, but the song lends itself to metaphorical reading. The song describes the Yalung Tsangpo river which travels to India, where it becomes the Brahmaputra, and how it accompanies the singer on their own journey across the Himalayas. Leaving the Himalayas and the homeland, in particular to go to India (the destination of the Yalung Tsangpo) is a strong metaphor for the journey of Tibetans, most importantly the Dalai Lama, into exile. The song could be

read as the voice of the Dalai Lama as he left for India, or it could be read as personifying the Dalai Lama as the Yalung Tsangpo, which has laid a path for all the future Tibetans who have followed him into exile.

走出喜馬拉雅 雪域的山，山山水水， 雅魯藏布江水，你一路歡唱	The mountains and rivers of the snow land are numerous, Yalung Tsangpo river, you are singing all along the way.
帶著我滿心的渴望，送向何方 帶著我滿心的渴望，送向何方 唉。。。。。。 雅魯藏布江水，你一路歡唱 走出喜馬拉雅，送我走一程	Taking the yearning of my heart, where are you heading? Ah, Yalung Tsangpo river, you are singing all along the way. Leaving the Himalayas you accompany me on my journey.
喜馬拉雅，我的天堂 雅魯藏布江，我的格桑花	Himalayas, you are my heaven. Yalung Tsangpo river, you are my flower of fortune.
帶上雪域的期盼，走出喜馬拉雅	Carrying the expectations of the snowland, Leaving the Himalayas.
帶上聖潔的哈達，走出喜馬拉雅 唉。。。。。。 雅魯藏布江水，你一路歡唱	Carrying a pure *khatag* [ceremonial scarf], Leaving the Himalayas. Ah, Yalung Tsangpo river, you are singing all along the way.
走出喜馬拉雅，送我走一程 雅魯藏布江水，你一路歡唱	Leaving the Himalayas, you accompany me on my journey. Yalung Tsangpo river, you are singing all along the way,
走出喜馬拉雅，送我走一程 一路不停的走，一路不停的想 走出喜馬拉雅，回頭望故鄉	Leaving the Himalayas, you accompany me on my journey. Not pausing and not stopping to think, leaving Himalayas. Turning around and looking at my homeland.

Censored songs

The following songs, although their meanings are only debatably nationalistic, became widely recognised as political and have been banned in nangma bars. All the songs are in Chinese language.

1. *Bai ta* 'White Stupa', sung by Yadong

In this song, the white stupa is seen as personifying the Dalai Lama. This is not a conventional symbol for him, unlike the sun, the snow lion or the cuckoo. The political reading of this song is probably an example of how anything that is described as deeply revered and a profound source of peace and happiness can be interpreted as the Dalai Lama. As mentioned above, it has been suggested that this song was never intended to be political, but was commissioned for an advert by a company called 'White Stupa'.

仰望純潔的天空， 想起一首古老的歌 那是媽媽唱給太陽的歌， 無論天空烏雲密佈 你潔白的身影，照亮虔誠的心 當天空光芒萬丈， 你雄偉的身影把和平撒向人間， 喲。。。。曲登嘎布 你是天上的星星，布滿草原 曲登嘎布，我心中的太陽	Looking at the pure and clear sky, remembering an ancient song, A song mother sang for the sun. Despite the dark clouds, your white shadow brightens up sincere hearts. When the sky is bright and clear, Your majestic shadow spreads peace in the human realm. Oh *Quden gapu* [Tib: *mchod rten dkar po*], You are the stars in the sky shining over the grassland. *Quden gapu*, you are the sun of my heart

2. *Shen qing de di di* 'Little Brother, With Deep Feelings', sung by Yadong

The political reading of this song rests primarily on the conventional symbolism of the Dalai Lama as the elder brother and the Panchen Lama as the younger brother. Furthermore, it can be seen as metaphorically describing the scattering of the Tibetan people and their suffering following Chinese 'liberation' through the image of the 'dispersed flock of sheep'. Here, the elder brother addresses the younger brother who is left to guard the 'flock', as the Panchen Lama remained in Tibet whereas the Dalai Lama went into exile. Ultimately, the song wishes for the two 'brothers' to be united.

深情的弟弟 是誰驅散了你的羊群，留下你守 在最後的草原 摸不到親人的手， 喊不出聲音，流不出淚水 在那裡，在那裡生長著你的夢 彩色的雨，銀色的河 青青的山坡上建起的家園 一雙小手捧起光明的燈盞 小小弟弟，滿懷深情的弟弟 要走一條認定路，深情的弟弟 掩去傷痕的弟弟，讓我們手牽手 一起往前走	Who has dispersed your flock of sheep, Leaving you to guard the last grassland, Not being able to reach the hands of the ones you love, Not being able to make a sound or shed a tear? Your dreams are growing over there, The coloured rain and silvery river, Homes built on the green hills, Lifting a bright lamp with a pair of little hands. Little brother is filled with deep feelings. Little brother must walk on the chosen path. Let's us take each other by the hand and walk forward.

Musical styles

During the Cultural Revolution, much protest singing revolved around refusing to observe the ban on traditional music. In some cases the singing was confrontational, but more commonly, people sang traditional or Tibetan nationalist songs when they were confident they would not get caught. Some incidents are described in the following sections. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution when the ban on traditional music was lifted, musical style has largely been removed as a factor of protest singing, since there are no styles that currently conflict with the state ideology, only a style that is particularly closely associated with state ideology, the 'developed' state dance troupe style. The fact that musical style is barely a politically active component in protest singing is illustrated by the fact that many Tibetan political songs are sung in a Chinese style (and often Chinese language), adding new lyrics to the tunes of popular songs influenced by Chinese styles. Even the songs sung by the nuns from Drapchi prison, some of Tibet's most intransigent dissidents, are sung to the tune of modern Chinese and sinicised Tibetan songs. Ngawang Sangdrol, one of the singers, was quite aware of this, and did not see it as conflicting with the message of the songs, despite her personal taste in music (her favourite music is Tibetan opera).[10] In fact, not only does the use of popular and often sinicised song tunes as a vehicle for political lyrics not conflict with the meaning in the opinion of singers, but it has helped people get away with singing political material on a number of occasions, since the familiar tune hindered officials from recognising the song as new and political.

10 TIN interview AM3 23 June 2003

There are Tibetans who support traditional music in various ways and there are reports that this support of traditional culture is a means of resistance to increasing modernisation and sinicisation of Tibetan culture. While this may be conceived as an act of protest or resistance by some of those who carry it out, it is not something that conflicts with current Chinese policy on Tibet. With the level of musical integration of Tibet with China taking place through pop music and the mass media, the government has little to worry about that Tibet will become too culturally distinct from China in terms of musical style through the performance of only truly traditional music. In addition to pop music, the government dance troupes also support the state's need for national integration. To a certain extent, the state supports the preservation of traditional Tibetan music, since it requires ethnic culture in Tibet to avoid outside accusations of cultural genocide and is also important for the potential of Tibet as a tourist attraction.

Protest singing

Like protest songs, protest singing takes many forms in Tibet. Many patriotic Tibetans engage in the singing of political songs in private, aiming to provide comfort to themselves, to express love for their country and the Dalai Lama, sorrow at what they see as the current dark times, and hopes for independence from China. During the Cultural Revolution, in addition to singing songs with political lyrics, people also used to sing traditional songs out of fondness and attachment for them and reluctance to give them up. Others have been more daring, singing political songs in larger groups, or releasing them on music albums. Some have got away with pushing the limits in private or public, and some have not. Much more rarely, Tibetans have used political song in a confrontational manner, as a form of demonstration. Most of the examples of confrontational singing that TIN has been informed of have taken place in prison by political prisoners. A number of examples of these different kinds of protest singing, inside and outside of prison, and the consequences they have had on the singers are presented here.

Getting away with pushing the limits or flouting the rules

During the Cultural Revolution, the secret singing of traditional music and anti-Chinese songs seems to have been widespread. Pema Bhum describes how the students in his school continued to sing banned *lashay* clandestinely, *"in secret, with trustworthy friends, or quietly to oneself"*, and particularly out of earshot of the teachers.[11] All those interviewed by TIN who lived through this era also report singing songs in private and being aware that others were doing the same. Sonam Dekyi describes:

> *In isolated places, without the knowledge of other people we used to sing and we also used to talk. …* [People] *sang the old songs quietly in their own homes.*

11 2001, *Six stars with a crooked neck: Tibetan memoirs of the Cultural Revolution:* 16. Dharamsala, India: Tibet Times.

> *When two to three people began to trust each other, they would eat and sing together and they would say that they had some enjoyment, that it was happy to be together for that moment.*[12]

Lobsang Dekyi, described the Chinese propaganda songs they had to sing in public, then added:

> *Whenever we sang ourselves, we always would sing songs that had heavy, sad and covert meanings. For example the song 'The white cloud in the east is not a sewn patch, the time will come for the sun to rise from behind the cloud'.*[13] *We would sing this song many times.*

Loyon also reported singing this song while in a work camp during the Cultural Revolution:

> *We were not allowed to sing but we used to sing without the knowledge of the Chinese, for example the song 'The white cloud in the east is not a sewn patch, the time will come for the sun to rise from behind the cloud'. We felt good sometimes, when we were able to sing such a song.*[14]

Both Sonam Dekyi and Loyon and their companions got away with singing this song many times, but they were also caught on occasions after being informed on. Sonam Dekyi continued, *"Some people reported* [us to the authorities] *and then the singers would receive beatings".*[15] The fear of being informed on was described also by Lochoe, who reported that although people did sing traditional or anti-Chinese songs at home, *"they didn't sing without thinking when there were two or three people around because you had to be cautious"* since that third person could become a witness if the authorities questioned you. Therefore, *"if there were three people they would talk about communist China"*.[16]

In addition to singing in secret, another way that Tibetans have evaded detection while singing protest songs has been to sing them to the words of well-known propaganda songs or pop songs, so unless someone can hear and understand the words very clearly, they would not be suspicious. Lobsang Dekyi describes how during the Cultural Revolution they changed the lyrics of the famous propaganda song 'The Sun Rises From the East', which praises Mao[17] to 'The sun rises from the snow mountain and its shining spreads over the market of Lhasa'. The subtle change in the context of the image of the sun changes its metaphoric meaning from Mao (rising from the east) to the Dalai Lama (rising from the snow mountain and Lhasa) and subverts the Chinese communist message into one of Tibetan nationalism. Lobsang Dekyi recalls someone being caught

12 TIN interview TIN 03-775, 19 August 2003
13 See chapter header and footnote 1.
14 TIN interview TIN 03-1318, 11 August 2003.
15 TIN interview TIN 03-1316, 29 July 2003.
16 TIN interview TIN 03-003, 12 June 2003.
17 See chapter 4 for the full lyrics of this song.

and punished for singing this song at the time.[18] Another example of the subversion of the message of propaganda songs during the Cultural Revolution is given by Pema Bhum. The propaganda song itself was a traditional *lu* which had been adapted to turn it into a revolutionary song:

Chairman Mao was born in the Sheep Year,
And the sheep are more numerous with each passing year.
Chairman Mao was born in the Horse Year,
And the horses run faster with each passing year.
Chairman Mao was born in the Dragon Year,
And the dragons are louder with each passing year.

However, as Pema Bhum writes,

the government heard only the lu sung in public, never what Tibetans sang in private. Were they to have heard the lu sung furtively [they would have heard]:

Chairman Mao was born in the Pig Year,
And the pigs grow fatter with each passing year.[19]

What can be seen as a modern example of altering the lyrics of a song to subvert the original meaning is a song released by a contemporary pop singer to the tune of the famous propaganda song 'The Tibetans and Chinese are Sons of the Same Mother'.[20] The new words metaphorically refute the original meaning of the unity of the Han and Tibetan races. Although they do not refer explicitly to the Tibetans and the Chinese, the lyrics give three examples of seemingly similar phenomena, and then caution the reader not to think they are the same. Sung to a new tune, these lyrics would have carried little political meaning, but to the old tune they recall the old lyrics and suggest a reply to them, that the Tibetans and Chinese are in fact distinct. The new lyrics are:

The cuckoo and the Jolmo have a similar way of uttering [calling] a song [their calls, their voice]
But don't think that they have the same value

Sandalwood and juniper envelope their sweet smell in a similar way
But don't think that they have the same value

The phoenix and the peacock have a similar way in which they show off their beauty
But the beauty of their white feathers is not the same

The adding of new lyrics to disguise protest singing or to subvert well-known propaganda songs has also taken place in prison, and is described in this chapter.

18 No further details available. It has not been possible to confirm the incident.
19 Bhum 2001: 116. Tibetan lyrics of song not available.
20 See chapter 4 for the lyrics of this song.

The most common means of expressing songs that protest against Chinese rule or Chinese definitions of Tibetan nationality is, as described above, the use of metaphoric lyrics, with many songs released on cassette containing lyrics that can, without a great stretch of the imagination, be interpreted in Tibetan nationalistic terms. A former Tibetan official described how the Chinese were *"fooled"* for years by Tibetans singing a song in private gatherings that, to their minds, clearly praised the Dalai Lama, whilst at face value praising the Potala palace. He recalls Tibetan officials singing this song at parties, and seeing people in tears as they sung in praise of the absent Dalai Lama. The song was not released on cassette, and was sung as a *chang hay* or 'drinking song'. The Chinese took it at face value as praising the Potala palace, and it was sung in Lhasa from the early to mid 1980s until 1987, when the Chinese officials realised its 'true', symbolic meaning, probably amidst the general crackdown in the aftermath of the pro-independence demonstrations of 1987.

There are also cases of people singing songs that explicitly refer to the Dalai Lama and not getting into trouble for it. Tsering, a singer from Sershul *Shen*, describes singing two songs in the last few years, the first on a cassette and the second during a show in the *shen*, both which refer to the Dalai Lama by name.[21] That she got away with this is very surprising. She appeared to be well aware of the rules and the possible dangers:

> *… it was said that we were not allowed to sing songs in praise of the Dalai Lama but I sang … in praise of the Dalai Lama and nobody said anything. It was said that the Chinese would say something and it was very dangerous but nobody did anything to me. … There are many songs where they have lyrics in praise of the Dalai Lama in poetical form. Not many people openly say the name of the Dalai Lama. … They don't have the guts to sing such songs because they worry that the Chinese may say something.*

When asked why she sang so openly when she knew others were not allowed to or would not dare to, she answered:

> *I didn't think anything. I felt a strong urge in me to sing such a song. I felt that they wouldn't say anything if I sang such a song. I felt that even if they did something to me, being a girl, they wouldn't do much. If Tibetan officials know it, they won't say anything because of their loyalty to Tibet, while Chinese officials won't [understand]. Perhaps they will hear about it later on. However, I don't know why, I felt a strong urge in me to sing that song.*[22]

The fact that she was a girl is very unlikely to have made a difference to the severity of punishment, and it is certainly not true that generally speaking, Tibetan cadres are loyal to Tibetans. Her young age, about 16, at the time, could have been a factor, but many juveniles have been arrested in China. As described below, six teenage boys were arrested for singing protest songs while walking around the Potala palace. Tsering was lucky.

21 The lyrics of these songs are given above.
22 TIN interview TIN 03-1082, 1 April 2003.

Getting caught

Many people get away with singing Tibetan nationalist songs through singing in private or with trusted friends, or through singing songs where the meaning is not clear enough to pin down. Yet some do get caught. More rarely, Tibetans use protest singing as an open means of confrontation, a form of demonstration. According to TIN records, this is most common amongst political prisoners.

Tibetans report that many people were beaten in punishment for being caught singing traditional or Tibetan nationalist songs during the Cultural Revolution. Lobsang Dekyi described how she and her friends were punished after someone informed on them, or even if they sang songs without clearly pronouncing the words:

> *There were many who received beatings because of their singing. We were punished by each of us having to make 10,000 bricks and to plant 100 trees in a month. We also would sing when we were working. When orders came to investigate what sorts of songs we were singing, we would sing songs through our noses and we wouldn't sing with clear voices. However, the pressure on the issue of what songs were sung was really severe. We received many beatings because of our singing.*[23]

Lochoe also recalled two stories that were current in Lhasa about people being caught and punished for singing. The first, from 1967, tells of a girl working as a construction labourer who without thinking sang the song 'The white cloud is not a patch stitched'. The story goes that one of the leaders heard her sing this song, and later the girl disappeared and was never heard of again. The second story, from 1969 or 1970, tells of a labourer, Adar Choejor, who, while digging soil sang a song mocking the Chinese: 'Eighteen was thrown over my shoulder and twelve came on my lap', which means that prior to 1959, Tibetan workers received 18 *khel* of grains per year, but the Chinese authorities reduced this to 12. He was said to have been put to death for singing this song.[24]

The ex-political prisoner Palden Gyatso, in his autobiography, recounts a more recent incident. He recalls a teacher, Dawa Dolma, who was in Drapchi prison in 1992 because she had taught her students the Tibetan national anthem:

> *A teacher called Dawa Dolma, was charged with teaching a "reactionary song". She had merely taught her students to sing the Tibetan national anthem and for this she had received a three-year sentence.*[25]

Another contemporary example of protest singing took place in a village in Amdo in 1997 and resulted in the four singers being fined as punishment. It appears that the singers had a political message they wished to communicate, were prepared to take the risk, and

23 TIN interview TIN 30-1316, 29 July 2003.
24 TIN interview TIN 03-1003, 12 June 2003. It has not been possible to confirm either story.
25 *The Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk: Palden Gyatso*: 217. Translated into English by Tsering Shakya, Grove Press: New York 1997. Excerpts available on http://www.colorado.edu/APS/landscapes/tibet/tarboche/paldeng.htm

had ideally hoped to get away with it. Tibetan Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials at the festival who were able to understand the meaning of the lyrics caught them. An eyewitness who later left Tibet told TIN researchers about this incident, which took place in the village with about 3,000 villagers and monks present during the 'barley festival' in the autumn:

> *It was at the time when we celebrate a party at the time of harvest in autumn. At that time there were many students because the schools were having holidays. And then at that time 4 villagers and students performed a song. The meaning of the song was: "Long live the Dalai Lama. A Snow Lion goes round the Barkor in Lhasa. The Snow Lion is the symbol for our country". For singing this song they were fined 500 Yuan each by the Chinese. … The police fined them saying: "This is a song in praise of the Dalai Lama propagating Tibet's independence".*[26]

A source recently reported the arrest in 2001 of a middle-aged itinerant singer for singing the song *Lhasa tsongpa marey*, 'Lhasa is Not Sold' in a courtyard in Lhasa. He has been sentenced to three years imprisonment and is being detained in Trisam re-education-through-labour camp.[27]

There are also reports and rumours of some of Tibet's most famous pop singers running into trouble with the authorities for singing songs with Tibetan nationalist content. Karma was expelled from his dance troupe and now runs a *nangma* bar. Dadon finally fled Tibet, it is said due to pressure from political songs she had sung. Dube is rumoured to have been questioned by the authorities. Yadong, Tibet's most successful singer, is also rumoured to have been questioned at least once about a number of songs he sang. However, apart from Karma, neither Dadon, while she was in Tibet, Dube or Yadong were actually sentenced, although some of their songs have been restricted. It is not possible to confirm these stories, but given the nature of some of their songs, and their additional politicisation through audience interpretation, it would not be surprising if these singers had experienced problems.

Confrontational singing

Although the above examples of singing got people into trouble, they stop short of open confrontation. Given the consequences, openly confrontational singing is rare. While secret singing of traditional songs during the Cultural Revolution appears to have been widespread, few people had the will to openly defy the ban. One of the few was Namgyal Tashi, the now deceased father of Ngawang Sangdrol, who, as Sonam Dekyi recalled, continued to sing *namthar*, songs from traditional Tibetan opera, during the Cultural Revolution. To sing any form of traditional Tibetan music constituted protest during this era, but to sing *namthar* was particularly defiant, since it is a genre that employs an extremely powerful and declamatory vocal style. Namgyal Tashi's protest was therefore

26 TIN interview TIN 98-279, 31 December 1998.
27 Undisclosed source, TIN doc TINX03-149.

anything but discrete, private or self-effacing. It rather showed an utter disregard and lack of care for the ban and the consequences of breaking it. In this, his spirit has much in common with his daughter Ngawang Sangdrol, another exceptionally defiant and determined individual, and he too spent a long time in prison. Sonam Dekyi recounted:

> [Namgyal Tashi] *was very fond of namthar and besides this he was also very good in singing namthar. If he sang a namthar in a very far off place, everybody could recognize his voice. They would say "today Namgyal Tashi la is working there and there". He would often sing namthar and he was always beaten for that. He always got beaten. In the evening, during meetings he always got beaten. In the afternoon when we went for manual work we always told Namgyal Tashi to stay quite because otherwise he would get beaten in the evening meetings. He, however, used to tell us, "So what? If this evening I have to take the blows it is good if I enjoyed something during the daytime. In the evening I will get the blow." And he would wear thick clothes because he knew that he would be beaten that evening. He would say "Oh, today I sang a song so I will receive blows in the evening. Thinking so, I am wearing thick clothes. Wearing one layer, two layers, three layers, many layers, if the Chinese beat me like this is still might be quite okay".*[28]

A more recent example is described in Xizang Ribao, the Chinese version of *Tibet Daily*, on 13 September 1989. The whole article reports on a "*mass meeting*" convened on 12 September 1989 by Lhasa Intermediate People's Court "*to pronounce judgement openly on six criminals*". This open judgement was "i*n order to guard the security of the state, to safeguard the unity of the homeland* [and] *to punish severely the counterrevolutionaries and other serious criminals*". The following excerpt in English translation describes the case of one of the six, Cirenouzhu, who received a sentence of twelve years in prison and four years loss of political rights for his role in encouraging people to sing protest songs:

> *The counterrevolutionary propagandist criminal Cirenouzhu was the manager of the small restaurant 'Duoxia'. He often told the young people who went to the restaurant that: "If there is a riot, you should go and demonstrate; I am too old to go now". He encouraged the young people to sing the reactionary song of "Tibet Independence" and gave them steamed stuffed buns to encourage them if they sang well. In the morning of 5 March 1989, the criminal Cirenouzhu shouted "The riot has begun, the sun has risen, you young people must all go to demonstrate". In March 1989 the criminal also asked Bianbaciren to record a large amount of reactionary songs and speeches on the "Independence of Tibet" to distribute to the young people. According to relevant regulations of the criminal law, Cirenouzhu has encouraged young people to participate in the riot with reactionary purpose in mind, and has therefore committed a serious crime. Moreover, he did not admit his crime and obey the law after being*

28 TIN interview TIN 03-775, 19 August 2003

arrested, and his action therefore constituted reactionary propaganda. He is sentenced to 12 years in prison with deprivation of political rights for 4 years.[29]

Another contemporary example of confrontational singing involved a group of six young men aged between 13 and 19 in Lhasa. The leader of the group, Lhakpa Dhondup had already been in trouble with the authorities for taking part in the demonstrations in Lhasa in 1987 aged 13, for which he had been expelled from school, and in 1990 he was arrested for shouting pro-independence slogans and served a three-year prison sentence. One evening in late November or early December 1993, shortly after Lhakpa Dhondup was released from his three-year sentence, he and the other five boys set off for an evening walk around the Potala. During the walk Lhakpa Dhondup describes how they "*spontaneously*" began to sing two songs: *Tso Ngonbo,* 'Lake Kokonor', openly praises the Dalai Lama and calls for independence; and *So so lamdo*, 'Go your own way', calls for independence.[30] Lhakpa Dhondup had learned *Tso Ngonbo* while serving his three-year prison sentence. The boys were arrested by plain-clothes policemen and taken to the *Shol Uyon Lenkhang* (*Shol* Neighbourhood Committee) where they were beaten and detained for three days before being released. Lhakpa Dhondup and one of the other boys left Tibet for exile soon after, fearing they were about to be arrested again.[31]

Protest singing in prison

The above example indicates the prevalence of protest singing in prisons in Tibet. A certain amount of non-political music making has been allowed in some prisons in Tibet as part of recreational and 'mental reform' activities, or has at least been tolerated. This has provided considerable comfort to prisoners. For example, Ngawang Choephel reported learning many non-political songs while he was detained in Powo Tramo prison, with prisoners in cells on the same courtyard as him calling out requests and applauding him.[32] In Drapchi prison, an ex-political prisoner reported that until 1993 the prisoners were allowed to play instruments on Saturday evening and Sunday all day (the instruments were kept locked up for the rest of the week), and on week days from around 8.30 in the evening until the final 'lights out' whistle was blown at 10.45, they were allowed to make noise, including singing.[33] Tsetan described how Ngawang Sangdrol's father Namgyal Tashi played the dulcimer (*yanchen*), Tibetan lute (*dranyen*) and flute, a prisoner called 'Pa Lhamo' used to sing Tibetan opera (hence his name - *Ache Lhamo* is Tibetan opera), and Jamphel Jangchub learned to play the flute while in prison.[34] He also described how prisoners would perform *dranyen shabdro* (a quick-stepping dance while singing and playing the *dranyen*) in the courtyard. Hearing and playing musical

29 TIN doc W5

30 This is not the famous song entitled *Tso ngonbo* written by Dondrub Gyal. It is a version of another *Tso ngonbo*, the lyrics of which are given above. See http://www.buyhard.fsnet.co.uk/testimony24.htm for an English translation of both the songs sung by the boys.

31 TIN interview FV22, 28 January 1994, with a thirteen year-old member of the group, Lhakpa Dhondup's testimony to TCHRD, see http://www.buyhard.fsnet.co.uk/testimony24.htm.

32 See TIN News Update 22 January 2002, http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/2002/2201b.htm

33 TIN interview AM1, 7 August 2003.

34 Jamphel Jangchub, still serving in Drapchi prison, was recently given a sentence reduction. See TIN News Update 4 August 2003 'Sentence reductions reported for two of Drepung's "group of ten"', http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/2003/0408.htm.

Four of the nuns who recorded the cassette of independence songs in Drapchi prison, Ngawang Sangdrol, Gyaltsen Drolkar, Phuntsog Nyidrol, Tenzin Thubten.

instruments was something that gave the prisoners pleasure, something they looked forward to. However, allowing political prisoners in Drapchi to keep musical instruments, books and also to study while in prison was stopped around 1993 after anti-Chinese literature was found in the cells of political prisoners. Common prisoners, however, were still allowed to continue these activities.[35] Singing was not allowed in either Gutsa prison or Trisam Education Through Labour Camp, and prisoners there have been punished for singing even non-political songs.

Apart from allowing or tolerating such politically neutral forms of music-making in some prisons, musical performance including the singing of Chinese nationalist songs has often been compulsory for political anniversaries and to a certain extent as a part of daily drill in prisons. However, in addition to permitted or tolerated politically neutral, recreational music, and the compulsory Chinese propaganda songs, prisoners have also pushed the limits in terms of singing when not allowed to and singing protest songs. Ex-political prisoners have reported singing while working or at night, for example, by keeping track of the movements of the watch and the prison guards.[36] The nuns Ngawang Choedron, Phuntsog Lamdrol, Lobsang Choedron and Phuntsog Tendrol, whose songs are given in Appendix B, described how they used to sing in their cells at Trisam re-education-through-labour camp:

> *We would sing inside the cells but one of the nuns would be sitting by the window to see if the police were coming. The others would in the mean time sing songs. If the police were coming then we would immediately stop and stay quiet. All of our cells were in the same line. Even if they were coming and if they heard the singing, they didn't know which cell was singing because all the cells were then very quiet. They would ask who had been singing. None of us would accept that there had been any singing and they then would go back as they didn't know.*[37]

They also sung while working in the fields at Trisam. The nuns, who were later moved to Gutsa, report being punished for their singing even though the Chinese guards had not realised that they were singing political songs. One of the nuns recalled:

> [In Gutsa] *we would sing songs after the light was turned off. There were six cells and the prisoners in three of the cells were called to come out* […] *to run round the courtyard because we had been singing.* […] [The Chinese guards] *didn't know the meaning of the songs at the time because they were Chinese. However, when they heard the sound they knew that we were singing and therefore they punished us in this way. [In one incident] we were singing songs cell-wise, with cells singing against each other, and we decided the other cells were not allowed to sing any song that had already been sung by another cell. I was made to stand up from 12 o'clock in the afternoon until 1 o'clock in the evening* [as punishment].[38]

35 The result of one is the prison band 'New Life' – see chapter 4 for a discussion of the band in the context of propaganda.
36 TIN interviews AM 1, 7 August 2003, AM 3, 23 June 2003 and JW 770, 28 March 2003.
37 TIN interview TIN 03-770, 28 March 2003.
38 TIN interview TIN 03-770, 28 March 2003.

That it was not discovered that they were singing political songs was, they believed, due to the fact that they set their political texts to the tune of existing songs, so no attention was drawn to the songs themselves. However, any singing was an act of defiance and protest against the prison rules and clearly led to struggles of will. For the Gutsa nuns, it was worth the punishment because of the comfort they derived from singing:

> *Through the singing of such songs, we were able to relieve our hearts from our heart pain and suffering*. […] *We received many beatings because of our singing but the singing made us happy as it made our sorrow disappear.*[39]

Other ex-political prisoners reported singing protest songs, yet fearing the consequences, sang only discretely or in a limited way to ensure they would not be caught. One said he "sometimes" changed a few words in non-political songs to make them political.[40] Another described composing a song in praise of the Dalai Lama with a friend using such an obscure, literary word to refer to the Dalai Lama that only he and his friend would understand the song's meaning.[41] In a more daring incident during the Cultural Revolution, as Lobsang Dekyi reported, a prisoner from Ema Gang prison managed to sing a song with a personal message in public in front of visitors and other prisoners who were making bricks and working in the fields without being caught:

> *Someone from among the prisoners sang a song with the tune of the song 'Socialism is good' and the song goes like 'Uncle Tashi la, please convey a message to my hometown, the food and the drinks are such and such, please ask them to look after my father and my mother'. This became well known in the west of Lhasa and everybody became so sad that they cried a lot when they heard this song.*[42]

Loyon described how a Nyingma Lama used to sing a song in praise of Guru Rinpoche every morning while in prison during the Cultural Revolution and managed to evade punishment by convincing the authorities, when questioned, that it was a song in praise of Mao:

> *Whenever we took tea, we used to sing a song like an offering prayer for tea, and, at one point, there was a Nyingma Lama in a prison who sang the following every morning: "Tibetans are grateful to the scholars of India. Pema Jungney [Guru Rinpoche] doesn't die and isn't reborn, and he is an addition to destroy the ogres". The Lama was always saying this as an offering prayer for tea to Pema Jungney. Someone who was close to the Lama heard and reported the matter [to the authorities], saying that the Lama was practicing blind faith. The official then called the lama and told him that he had done something wrong and that he should confess. When the lama denied having done anything wrong, the Chinese told him that he would give him a little indication and asked*

39 ibid
40 TIN interview AM 1, 7 August 2003.
41 Personal communication October 2003.
42 TIN interview TIN 03-1316, 29 July 2003

> *him what he used to do before drinking tea. The Lama must have been quite clever and answered, "I see, is that what you mean, that is me praising Mao Zedong". He then explained how he praised Mao Zedong by* [alleging that the meaning of his morning prayer was:] *"China's Beijing is kind to Tibet, Mao's body neither is born nor dies. We make this offering to Mao Zedong to currently bring America to a halt".*[43] [The original text of this common offering prayer is: "India's scholars are kind to Tibet, Padmasambhava's body neither is born nor dies. We pray to Orgyen Rinpoche to currently bring the evil spirits from the south and the west to a halt".]

The singing of political songs has been described as a particularly important means of expression by the nuns from Gutsa, a way of being able to express to themselves and each other their personal experiences and views on the political situation in Tibet and in that way strengthening their spirit:

> *Generally while we were in the prison, however much the Chinese tormented us, we never lost our hearts, and therefore we made songs that reflected our feelings. Secondly we also made songs based on the situation in Tibet, for example the song 'The 'root' lama of Tibet'.* […] *Also we made songs about advice given by our parents, for example when our parents came to visit we created the song 'The day of meeting on the fourteenth'.*[44] […] *Sometimes we made the songs that reflected our hopes, such as the song 'Life essence of the country'. Sometimes we made the songs that consoled and comforted us when we felt depressed, such as the song 'Looking out from Gutsa'.*[45]

The singing of these songs was also a way for the nuns to strengthen and support each other as a group:

> *When we sang the songs that were about the feeling we had while being beaten, it was a means to connect to each other. In the same way, for example, when all were sleeping on an empty stomach, if one of us would sing a song about food, then it was like consoling each other, and it would make us feel a little bit happy.*[46]

Ultimately, they saw the composing of these songs as a means to communicate with the outside world:

> *We didn't have anyone with whom we could share our suffering. We thought that* [people] *in society would notice it if we sang songs that reflect the desperate situation of Tibet.*[47]

43 TIN interview TIN 03-1318, 11 August 2003.
44 The 14th day of the month was visiting day.
45 TIN interview TIN 03-770, 28 March 2003. The lyrics of all the songs by these nuns are given in Appendix B.
46 ibid
47 ibid

> [We planned] […] *after our release we would show/say to our trusted friends that we created these songs, that we sang these songs.*[48]

The nun and ex-long-term political prisoner Ngawang Sangdrol, who was also detained in Gutsa prior to her detention in Drapchi, explained how most of the explicit Tibetan protest songs have either been composed or mediated by political prisoners, with new prisoners learning songs from old prisoners, or people learning songs in society from ex-political prisoners, resulting in many songs with substantial overlap in lyrics. Such protest songs are largely communicated by word of mouth, but in 1993, in Tibet's most extraordinary incident of protest singing, Ngawang Sangdrol and 13 other nuns gained an opportunity to magnify the impact of their message through the mass media. The group of 14 nuns serving sentences for political crimes in Drapchi prison borrowed a cassette recorder, recorded a cassette of 14 protest songs explicitly denouncing Chinese rule in Tibet and praising the Dalai Lama, and then had the tape smuggled out of the prison. This tape circulated in Lhasa, was smuggled to India, and a copy was also obtained by TIN, which released the songs and translations of their lyrics on a CD-ROM.[49] Although the nuns had sung many political songs undetected in their cells, their recording of the songs on cassette was discovered, and they all received heavy sentence extensions as punishment, increasing their average sentence length to 11 years from five years. Thirteen of the nuns are now released or presumed released and one, Ngawang Lochoe, died in custody in February 2001.

Ngawang Sangdrol described how they hid the cassette recorder (which was around half a metre in length) in bundles of clothes and passed it from cell to cell, taking it in turns to record each song at night while the night watch was out of earshot. They too used the tunes of existing songs, adding lyrics consisting of songs composed by previous political prisoners and new phrases they had made up themselves. Like the nuns from Gutsa and Trisam, Ngawang Sangdrol and her fellow nuns took this as an opportunity to communicate with the outside world:

> *We didn't normally have any opportunity to meet and talk to our family and other people outside prison. Even people close to us didn't know much about the situation in prison.* […] *Therefore* […] *we thought we could tell the world outside about prison through our songs.*[50]

While this incident of protest singing had the biggest impact worldwide as well as for them personally, Ngawang Sangdrol described how they managed to get away with singing protest and non-protest songs quite frequently, doing so whenever they got the chance, "*When you wanted to sing and there was no guard then you would sing*".[51] Ngawang Sangdrol explained how singing helped strengthen her resolve during her long detention and also brought her happiness despite the mental and physical suffering she was enduring at the time:

48 TIN interview TIN 03-975, 20 April 2003.
49 It was published in combination with Marshall 2000 *Rukhag 3: The nuns of Drapchi prison* and the CD ROM are available from TIN. See http://www.tibetinfo.net/publications/bbp/rukhag_3.htm
50 TIN interview AM 4, 5 January 2004.
51 TIN interview AM 3, 23 June 2003.

> *When I heard the singing of a song and when I understood the words of the song, it helped me in my determination, and it would fill me with memories. When we sang a song, it really felt like it was helping us a lot.* […] *It strengthened our determination and also* [brought us happiness].[52]

Confrontational singing and demonstrations in prison

A number of cases of directly confrontational singing of protest songs at Drapchi prison have been reported in addition to the protests staged at the singing of Chinese patriotic songs described in chapter four. A group of nuns are reported to have sung nationalist songs during the celebrations for Losar 1994 held in the prison. Consequently, these nuns were badly beaten for this and one of the nuns, Phuntsog Yangki, who was in her early 20s, died several months later on Saturday 4 June.[53]

In another protest by nuns at Drapchi prison, a double-sided confrontation was carried out through music. The prisoners were forced to sing songs in praise of Chairman Mao, and two of the nuns protested by interrupting and overriding the Chairman Mao song with a Tibetan independence song. One of the nuns present, who later escaped into exile, recounted the events of the day:

> *Every year on the eve of Tibetan New Year prisoners were asked to sing and dance. As usual, in 1997 on the third day of Tibetan New Year, at dormitory number 3, two prison guards divided the inmates into two groups i.e. old prisoners and new arrivals. Three nuns who were regarded by the prison cadres as "well reformed" inmates were asked to sing a song in praise of Mao. While these three nuns were singing the song in praise of Mao, two other nuns stood amongst the women inmates. They were Nyima, an 18 year old nun from Phenpo Phodo Nunnery in Phenpo Lhundrub Dzong, and Jamdrol, a 23 year old nun from Phenpo Gyabdrak nunnery in Phenpo Lhundrub Dzong. The two nuns started singing a Tibetan freedom song in high-pitched voices to compete with the three nuns singing the song in praise of Mao. The two nuns were immediately taken to the prison office and interrogated and severely beaten. Later the two nuns were put into solitary confinement. After the two nuns were transferred to solitary confinement, all the women inmates demanded the release of their two friends from the solitary cells. The army personnel were called in to bring the situation under control. The army personnel beat Nyima and Jamdrol again and other prisoners were locked in their dormitories. The army cadres also beat some of the other prisoners.*[54]

Another protest involving singing, again by nuns, occurred at Trisam prison on 10 August 1994. This protest began after a Chinese guard was accidentally splashed with water

52 TIN interview AM 4, 5 January 2004.
53 TIN doc 5WC
54 TIN doc TL1, 27 September 1998. Quoted in Marshall 2000: 37. The other nuns present at the incident later went on hunger strike in protest at the two nuns being put into solitary confinement. See Marshall 2000: 37-38 for more details concerning this incident and its aftermath.

while the nuns were tending vegetables. Two of the nuns were denied their monthly visits as punishment and all the nuns then protested by refusing to emerge from their cells. One of the nuns, Lobsang Choedron, described how they then began singing pro-independence songs:

> *There are three rooms, only three rooms, and we* [the nuns in the three rooms] *are all singing, just normal singing; first it* [the singing] *started from one nun, just normal singing, it had no meaning about freedom; then after, then we start to sing about our freedom* […].
>
> *Normally* […] *when the Chinese staff came they did not listen very well to what we were singing but they heard just [the word] "freedom", but they* [the authorities] *don't know why we are singing.* […]
>
> [They] *asked us to come out. All the 13 nuns that we were at that time said we had been imprisoned for no reason and started to shout slogans and to say there are no human rights in Tibet. Some prisoners from the other Unit* [Tib: *Rukhag*] *heard and shouted too. Guards started beating us with electric prods, sticks, or kicking us, pulling and pushing our head by holding our long hair (which we were not allowed to cut); we were handcuffed or had our hands held behind our back by a cord. We were separated but all received the same ill-treatment. We could hardly breath and could not stand. There was a lot of Gong An* [Public Security Officials]*, maybe 50 persons, all Chinese. It lasted from 11 p.m. to 5.00 a.m. the next day.*[55]

The nuns were then reported to have been kept in isolation without food or ventilation for seven days for refusing to apologise. One of the nuns, Sherab Ngawang, died shortly after being released on 2 February 1995. A TIN News Update dated 30 May 1995 reported that the beating she had received after this protest was a factor in her death. A Xinhua report dated 26 February 1995 dismissed these accounts as a *"sheer distortion of facts"* and claimed her death was a result of cerebral tuberculosis.

Singing was also a factor in the 'counter-revolutionary' crimes committed by the recently released long-term political prisoner Tagna Jigme Zangpo in his third imprisonment, which began in 1983. His sentencing document states:

> *Even after the defendant was arrested, he continued to propagate and support reactionary views; openly raised reactionary slogans; sang the Tibetan national anthem; and on top of this, continued to claim that he will struggle for 'Tibetan independence'.*[56]

55 TIN interview KR 36, 6 April 1996. This is not the same Lobsang Choedron of TIN 03-770, who is also a nun and ex-political prisoner who stayed in Trisam and later Gutsa.
56 Marshall 2000: 21