

## Chapter Two

# Cultural policy, modernization and change in Tibetan music from 1951 until the 1980s

*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. – Tales from Tibetan opera: 12-13, by Chinese scholar Wang Yao, 1986.*

## The first period of ‘liberation’: 1951-1965

Policy towards the arts in Tibet was initially based closely on Mao’s statements at the *Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art* in Yan’an in 1942, and from the early 1950s, changes were implemented that aimed at ‘reforming’ certain traditions of Tibetan performing arts and ‘developing’ them according to the paternalistic and ethnocentric notions described in the previous chapter. This resulted in increasing Chinese influence on certain Tibetan genres during this period. Government initiatives were also aimed at preserving traditions of Tibetan music, but these were either more ‘development’ based, implementing change rather than preserving, or focused on the documentation of song texts, which had no significant effect on living musical traditions.

New genres were also introduced to Tibet during this period: revolutionary ‘folksongs’ and spoken drama (as opposed to traditional sung drama or Tibetan opera, *Ache Lhamo*). The revolutionary ‘folksongs’ were purely propaganda, and the spoken drama also followed the Party line closely.

Overall, the policies of the period prior to the Cultural Revolution only affected small pockets of Tibetan musical culture in cities and left the countryside, where the vast majority of Tibetans lived, virtually untouched.

1 In May 1956 at a speech at an Enlarged Meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Mao stated, “I think our policy should be to let a hundred flowers and a hundred schools of thought contend”. However, the quantity of criticism that arose from this call for openness led to another wave of repression, which saw many artistes and writers being jailed and executed. This statement has now been detached from its original context and is ironically used to sum up the post-Cultural Revolution openness and acceptance of diversity.

## Censorship and restrictions on existing genres

All traditional genres were banned during the Cultural Revolution, but some became restricted or censored far earlier. Genres associated with particular socio-religious ceremonies and celebrations such as *shon* in western Tibet, *gar* in Amdo, *dro drodung* and *kordro* in Kham, and *sheychen* and *korshey* of central Tibet “*vanished with the abolition in the late 1950s of the traditional religious context of celebrations*”.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese authorities in Tibet have restricted and continue to restrict religious activities such as these not only because of the atheistic policies of the Party which see religion as backward and superstitious, but also because of the importance of religion, through the monasteries, as seat of political power in traditional Tibet, and the fact that most Tibetans remain devout Buddhists.

The tradition of *gar* in central Tibet (a tradition distinct from Amdo *gar*), the ceremonial music and dance of the Dalai Lama’s court, was abolished in 1959 after the Dalai Lama fled to India during the 10 March uprising. This tradition had been declining before the Chinese occupation of Tibet, but stopped outright after the flight of the Dalai Lama. It was revived in the 1980s but under strict control since its primary function was to accompany the Dalai Lama’s ceremonial travels through Lhasa and provide music for important guests at his court, thereby remembering his traditional position in Tibetan society.

Tibetan opera became an important target for reforms from the early 1960s, with plots being amended to bring them in line with state ideology and to serve propaganda purposes. The opera *Nangsa* was the most radically ‘reformed’. It was adapted in the early 1960s in order to convey the socialist revolutionary message of aristocrats (the in-laws of Nangsa, the heroine) oppressing poor people (Nangsa and her family).<sup>3</sup>

The most popular opera with the Chinese authorities was and still is *Gyasa Balsa*, which tells the story of Tibet’s greatest King, Songtsen Gampo. Whilst Tibetans traditionally remember Songtsen Gampo because he was the most important of the three ‘religious Kings’ who propagated Buddhism in Tibet around the seventh century, the Chinese authorities became particularly enamoured of him because he had a Chinese wife. The story is thus presented as hard evidence of the centuries-old existence of political ties and a warm relationship between Chinese and Tibetans, and is used to corroborate China’s claim that ‘Tibet is an inalienable part of China’. Chinese Tibetologist Wang Yao, for instance, says that the drama “*reflects and sings the praises of the flesh-and-blood deep feelings between the two great nationalities Tibetan and Han*” and “*expressed the respect of the Tibetan popular masses and artistes of national unity and friendship*”.<sup>4</sup> Songtsen Gampo also had a Nepalese wife and a Tibetan wife, but their presence is typically underplayed, since it would weaken the impact of the Chinese wife as ‘proof’ of the alleged ‘flesh and blood’ Sino-Tibetan relationship.

2 Henrion-Dourcy and Tsereng Dhondup 2001 Tibet, §III, 1 ‘Folk music’: 450. In Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (eds.) New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (2nd edition): 449-452. London: Macmillan.

3 Personal communication Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, January 2004, TIN interview with Norbu Tsering, TIN-03-990, 23 May 203.

4 1986: 414, quoted in Mackerras 1992 ‘Integration and the Dramas of China’s Minorities’: 5-7, in *Asian Theatre Journal* 9,1: 1-37.

The role of magic and religion was also reduced in the plots of many Tibetan operas, which were secularised according to atheistic socialist ideology. The musicologist Colin Mackerras reported on a reformed version of *Nangsa* in 1980 that “*religion, which saturated the old version, is no longer a major positive force in the rearranged version [...] there is no magic at all until Shang-sa is saved [from an attempt to kill her]*”.<sup>5</sup> Such ‘reformed’ operas are still performed and created today. However, un-reformed genres have also been revived, particularly in rural areas.

In addition to such reformed traditional Tibetan opera, new plays were written to be performed as Tibetan opera from 1959, and modern Chinese forms of music-drama were performed from the 1950s. These ‘new’ Tibetan operas and musical plays were written to exemplify socialist themes.<sup>6</sup> They were also created to support current political campaigns. For example, the Tibetan Opera Company was “*urged [by the Chinese government to] stage plays and operas in support of China’s foreign policy during the Vietnam war*”.<sup>7</sup>

### ‘Preservation’ and ‘development’ of Tibetan music by the state

At the same time as restricting and adapting certain traditions to suit the party line, the authorities also launched energetic initiatives aimed at ‘preserving’ the arts and literature of the ‘minority nationals’. The preservation drive consisted mainly of the documentation of folk music, which has continued on a huge scale since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Folk songs, traditionally passed down orally, were collected and published, usually as Chinese translations. China’s *White Paper on Tibetan Culture*, published June 2000, emphasises the collection and documentation activities of the government during the 1950s and into the 1980s:

*As early as in the 1950s, a group of literary and art workers from different ethnic groups went to Tibet to collect music, dance, folk stories, proverbs and folk songs together with their Tibetan counterparts, and edited them for publication. One fruit of their labours was the book Tibetan Folk Songs. Beginning at the end of the 1970s, the state conducted a large-scale systematic survey, collection and edition of the Tibetan folk cultural and art heritage”.*<sup>8</sup>

The volumes of folk songs produced in the Chinese language have made the existence of Tibetan folk music visible to the Chinese reading public across the PRC and have inspired further folk song collection expeditions by Chinese musicians for raw material to use in songs and compositions.<sup>9</sup> However, these anthologies have no direct impact on

5 Mackerras 1988 ‘Drama in the Tibetan Autonomous Region’: 205, in *Asian Theatre Journal* 5,2: 198-219.

6 Personal communication Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, January 2004

7 Meserve and Meserve 1979: 111

8 *White Paper on Tibetan Culture*, June 2000, IV: ‘Culture and Art are being Inherited and Developed in An All-Round Way’. Full text of this White Paper available on <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/features/tibetpaper/tibet.html>. See also chapter 4 for further discussion of the Chinese ‘preservation’ of Tibetan culture.

9 This has led to some heated controversies as commercial profit is made from folk music based around issues of copyright (see Rees 2003 ‘The Age of Consent: Traditional Music, Intellectual Property and Changing Attitudes in the People’s Republic of China’, Harris (in press) ‘Wang Luobin: Folksong King of the Northwest or Song Thief? Copyright, Representation and Chinese Folksongs’); and around issues of cultural appropriation (see Upton 2002 ‘The Politics and Poetics of *Sister Drum*: “Tibetan” Music in the Global Marketplace’).

the living traditions themselves. Furthermore, the collections of folk song texts tend to be translated into Chinese rather than written phonetically as Tibetan in Chinese characters, let alone reproduced in Tibetan, thus serving the interest of non-Tibetan speakers in Tibetan songs rather than actually preserving the original songs. Apart from the strong element of cultural assimilation in these collections of minority songs presented in Chinese for Chinese consumption, some collections have also been criticised for vastly over-representing revolutionary ‘folksongs’, the Party’s own propaganda pieces.<sup>10</sup> While this is debatable, it can be stated that the anthologies have predictably omitted the wealth of songs that express points of view or accounts of history that conflict with those of the state.

The ‘preservation’ drive also involved the setting up of dance troupes at various administrative levels across the PRC during the 1950s.<sup>11</sup> In many parts of the PRC these troupes preserved traditions that may otherwise have died out, albeit at the cost of changing them significantly. However, in the case of Tibet, the troupes brought about change to traditions that were not dying out through their drive to ‘develop’ Tibetan performing arts according to socialist and Chinese nationalist ideology and the paternalistic Han notion of ‘improving’ the ‘backward’ music of the minorities. These troupes were disbanded during the Cultural Revolution, but revived in the 1980s with immense enthusiasm and support from the authorities who also began to utilise them for external propaganda purposes, for example, sending them abroad for foreign tours.

In 1951, the Central Institute for Nationalities was set up in Beijing and an Arts Department established in 1959. This institute trains minority artistes, and also undertakes research into the cultures of China’s minorities. In 1952, the Central Nationalities Song and Dance Troupe (Ch: *Zhongyang Minzu Gewutuan*) was established



**Tibetan dancers at Third China Art Festival'**

<sup>10</sup> See Yang Mu 1994 'Academic Ignorance of Political Taboo? Some Issues in China's Study of its Folk Song Culture'.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 3 describes how these dance troupes train performers in today's Tibet.

in Beijing. According to Mao's dictum that art must be "*for the masses*", such dance troupes as these performed in areas across the PRC, including Tibet, and still continue to do so.

Throughout the 1950s, lower-level troupes were also created, such as the Tibetan Autonomous Region Song and Dance Troupe, which was set up in 1958. The national-level troupes searched for "*promising folk artists in minority areas*" in order to recruit members, and the lower-level groups recruited from existing musical organisations and local artists. The Tibetan Music-Drama Troupe, for example, established in Lhasa in 1960, was formed largely from performers and teachers from the traditional *Kyormolung* opera troupe.

On the one hand, the performing traditions of the minorities are preserved and protected under the umbrella of the government of the PRC, but on the other, within the centralistic-hierarchical structures of the dance troupes, these traditions are 'developed' strictly along current Chinese lines (themselves strongly influenced by western music) through the system of training minority artistes in the central institutions. These professional troupes now perform operas, dances and folk songs all in a style markedly different from that of the amateur troupes, whose style remains more traditional because they exist outside of this training network. Musicologist Helen Rees describes the government dance troupe style:



Modern, professional dance troupe performing 'developed' style dances, with 'developed' costumes

[The troupes] contribute to a partial standardisation of minority performing arts at the state-sponsored professional level. This results from the custom of sending promising minority performers to study at a national or provincial academy such as the arts department of the Central Nationalities University, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, or the Yunnan Art Institute. There, taught usually by Han professors, the student learns the mainstream, Western-influenced, pan-Chinese conservatory style of playing, dancing, or singing. This typically includes equal temperament to replace local tuning systems, simple European-style functional harmony, and reliance on scores rather than aural learning techniques. The student then introduces this ubiquitous national style, together with standardised Han and Western instruments, to the state-sponsored regional performing troupes to which most such graduates are assigned.<sup>12</sup>

Tibetan music scholars Henrion-Dourcy and Dhondup describe the professional dance troupes of Tibet similarly:

*State-supported troupes for the performing arts offer theatricalized versions of traditional music on stage, with elaborate costumes, modified voice timbres and metres, and Chinese and Western instruments accompany songs traditionally performed unaccompanied.*<sup>13</sup>

Ngodrub, a Tibetan performer who went to study in China and performed in a dance troupe in Lhasa for many years gave a first hand point of view of the training process:

*A child is selected to get a dance training when he or she is nine years old and they will be kept and trained in China until they are 15, 16 or 17 years old. While they are being trained in China, first of all, they are trained in body exercises. Later they are trained in traditional dances of the most popular nationalities from the 56 nationalities of China – of course they are also trained in Tibetan traditional dance. Nevertheless, there must be a Chinese flavour. The way the Chinese teach Tibetan songs and the way Tibetans teach Tibetan songs are different.*<sup>14</sup>

It has also been noted that Chinese performers and teachers tend to dominate the big dance troupes and the performances at festivals,<sup>15</sup> adding a further route for Han influence to enter the arts of the minority nationalities.

Another important change introduced by the Chinese authorities was the use of theatres for performance rather than open-air sites. More directly political matters, such as loyalty

<sup>12</sup> Rees 2002: 443. Rees also notes the parallels with the former Soviet training of minority performers. See also Carol Pegg 2001 *Mongolian Music, Dance and Oral Narrative: Performing Diverse Identities*, University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, for a detailed study of 'Outer' Mongolia and the Soviet legacy.

<sup>13</sup> 2001: 450

<sup>14</sup> TIN interview TIN 03-1264, 3 August 2003

<sup>15</sup> Mackerras 1984: 191-192 and 215

to the Party or Party membership, may also play a role in the recruitment of government dance troupes, although they are supposed to recruit according to talent and aptitude alone.<sup>16</sup>

This process of ‘developing’ traditional material is exactly that prescribed by Mao in the *Talks* when he called on people to ‘go amongst the masses’ to collect vibrant culture (music, dance, literature) as opposed to lifeless bourgeois art and literature. This is then used as raw material by artists and writers to create truly modern and (up until the 1980s) ‘socialist’ art. In addition to Tibetan operas, large numbers of folk songs and dance have been and continue to be “*dug out and rearranged*”<sup>17</sup> to create ‘sophisticated’ musical art by mainland composers, ‘reformed’ drama, the revolutionary ‘folksongs’ of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and modern propaganda songs.

The PRC’s *White Paper on Tibetan Culture* of 2000 proudly reports on this process, clearly revealing the thinking that the traditional art and literature of the Tibetan masses, whilst vibrant, needs to be developed before it becomes true art:

*Modern Tibetan literature and art have developed greatly in the process of combining with the traditional formats, styles and characteristics. After the peaceful liberation of Tibet, a group of literary and art workers from different ethnic groups went into the thick of life in Tibet to explore and inherit the fine aspects of the local literature and art tradition. They created a lot of poems, novels, songs, dances, fine art works, films and photos, introducing new literary and artistic ideas and creation experience to the then closed or semi-closed parts of Tibet. A large number of Tibetan intellectuals loving literature and art joined the new ranks of literary and art workers, and created a batch of modern works with distinctive ethnic features.*<sup>18</sup>

As opposed to the music of ‘the masses’ in the 1950s and 1960s with its wholly or largely Tibetan basis, these modern, ‘developed’ pieces contain only ‘distinctive ethnic features’ or the ‘national characteristics’ of Tibetan music, song and dance, and carry overt political messages. The passage goes on to list some of these pieces:

*Particularly after the Democratic Reform in 1959, a number of excellent literary and art works emerged in Tibet and, to a certain degree, influenced people both at home and abroad. These works include the songs “On the Golden Hill of Beijing” and “Liberated Serfs Sing,” the song with actions “Strolling Around the new Town,” the song and dance combinations “Washing Clothes,” the dance epic with music “Emancipated Serfs Turn Toward the Sun,” the drama “Princess Wen Cheng” and the movie “The Serfs.”*

16 Mackerras states that politics is a criterion in the pre-Cultural Revolution era, 1988: 210. Modern performers have reported pressures to sing in Chinese and to sing in praise of China, even if it is not essential to be a Party member to have a successful career. See chapter 3, section 3.2.

17 Mackerras 1984: 193-4

18 <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/features/tibetpaper/tibet.html>

'On the Golden Hill of Beijing' (or 'Over the golden mountain of Beijing') can be heard on [www.morningsun.org](http://www.morningsun.org), a website dedicated to the Cultural Revolution on the virtual radio. It is based on a Tibetan folk song, but is rearranged with Western instruments, and is sung in the sinicised voice of Tsetan Dolma, famous for singing Party propaganda.<sup>19</sup>

Such new music and drama with 'ethnic features' continues to be created by government troupes and cadres and modern composers but is less frequently focused on the Party line since the end of the 1970s. However, it is inherently political in terms of the way Tibetan music and identity is being used by state institutions and Chinese individuals, and is very much in the tradition of the Han majority paternalistically 'developing' the minority's culture. For example, a specialty dance contest opened in Lhasa on 25 August 2003 and a modern dance called 'The Soul of Yak' was performed by the Lhasa folk art troupe.<sup>20</sup> A musical named *Shangrila* played from October to November 2002 at the China Children's Art Theatre. The theatre director, Ouyang Yibin, who toured Dechen Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan province, claimed "I got inspiration from the local people who live smooth and agreeable lives and maintain a harmonious relationship with nature". The composer, Zou Ye, who also travelled to Dechen, used folk music he had collected there.<sup>21</sup> *China Daily* reported on a concert planned for September 2001 in Beijing called 'The Tibetan Symphonic Concert for the



Modern dance drama 'Tibetan Antelope' staged in Beijing



<sup>19</sup> Tsetan Dolma's career is discussed in chapter 3 and her role as a propaganda tool in chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> See 'Dancing with high passion', 1 September 2003, <http://www.tibetinfo.com.cn/english/news/2003-9-1/News0200391161857.htm>

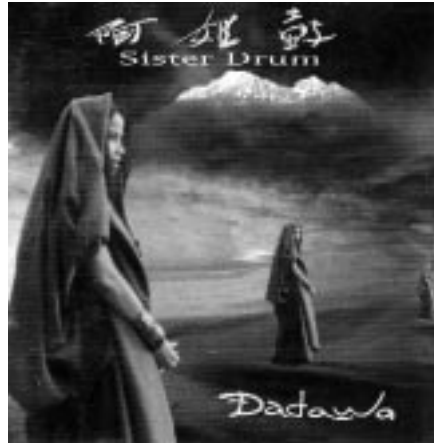
<sup>21</sup> See 'Sacred land represented on stage', *China Daily*, 24 October 2002, <http://www1.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2002-10-24/90850.html>



New Century', which was to include newly composed "*Tibet-themed*" pieces. One of the composers, Liu Yuan, "*who [had] been planning to compose a piece on Tibet for two years*" was quoted as follows:

*Tibet has the most beautiful music in the world, which has always been inspiring us composers. [...] We decided to depict Tibet in the form of symphony, the highest musical form, which is appropriate at a time of cultural mixing and resource sharing.*<sup>22</sup>

The most famous example of the collecting of Tibetan folk music as a basis for modern composition by Chinese composers is the album *Sister Drum* (1995), created by 'Dadawa' (Zhu Zheqin), the main singer of the album, He Xuntian, who composed the songs and produced the album, and He Xunyou (Xuntian's brother), who wrote most of the lyrics. In July and August 1993, the three of them travelled to Tibet to collect and record songs as material for the album.<sup>23</sup> Although not connected to Party policies, the album, and others like it, echo political issues such as the assimilation and 'integration' of Tibetan culture into the Han majority motherland, and the appropriation of minority culture by Han Chinese for their own gain. These issues are inherently controversial. This album, however, was particularly controversial due to the Tibetan persona adopted by the singer, 'Dadawa', who presented herself in an approximation of nuns' robes. As anthropologist Janet Upton points out:



Dadawa album *Sister Drum* (1995)

*In the view of Sister Drum's Tibetan critics, not only was a representative of Chinese repression trying to exploit Tibetan culture for her own material gain, she was doing so by adopting the garb of one of the most repressed segments of the Tibetan community.*<sup>24</sup>

This process of 'developing' traditional music is regarded as a great improvement of Tibetan music by the authorities, many Chinese and even significant numbers of Chinese schooled Tibetans. In 1964, Chinese writer Qu Liuyi wrote about 'reformed' musical dramas: "*In their performance, music, dance and artistic design, quite a few drama styles have begun undergoing the processes of developing from crude to complicated, from simple to rich*".<sup>25</sup> The same point of view emerges in a 2001 article on development and modernisation in Tibet from *Beijing Review*: "*Folk songs, dances, dramas, tales and other*

<sup>22</sup> *China Daily* 11 June 2001. See also footnote [14 - check number from final edit] above relating to controversies over copyright and cultural appropriation that have emerged in recent years in relation to the use of minority folk music by mainland composers.

<sup>23</sup> See also chapter 4 for further discussion of this highly controversial yet very successful album.

<sup>24</sup> Upton 2002: 112.

<sup>25</sup> 1964 *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu xiju* ('The Theatres of China's Minority Nationalities'): 13, quoted in Mackerras 1992: 12.

*forms of artistic expression have been refined and imbued with new ideas and higher forms of expression for enjoyment by the general public”.*<sup>26</sup>

The dance troupes and their graduates have been a powerful government tool for achieving national integration of the minorities within the PRC. These dance troupes, through creating and promoting a pan-Chinese style, have achieved and continue to consolidate a unity among China’s diverse ethnic groups which never existed before the communists came to power in 1949.<sup>27</sup> Most of the nationalities had little or no cultural connection with each other prior to 1949. For example, whilst there have been cultural links between the Chinese and the Tibetans (for example, the Tibetan vertically-bowed fiddle, the *piwang*, and the dulcimer, the *yangqin*, both came to Tibet from China), and significant interaction between the Tibetans and the Mongols, the Tibetans had virtually nothing in common with the Uyghurs, whose music is largely Central Asian in origin, let alone the Koreans, thousands of kilometres to the east. However, all these disparate nationalities now have significant cultural ties through this newly created musical and performance style. Whilst the restrictions on traditional genres, after reaching a frenzied peak during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, have since relaxed, the government dance troupes continue their work in achieving the ‘unity of the nationalities’, although since the 1990s they have increasingly been expected to find funds ‘in the marketplace’ through performances rather than existing solely from state stipends.<sup>28</sup> The practice of using minority folk music as a basis for modern songs and compositions by mainland composers, however, remains fashionable.

The promise of the Chinese authorities is cultural enrichment for the Tibetans, but whether this is cultural enrichment, integration, assimilation or even destruction remains debated by the different ethnic and political groups involved in the issues surrounding modern Tibet. Important questions also remain as to who controls the development of Tibetan culture, according to whose criteria is it developed, and whose is it to develop. These issues are addressed in chapter 6.

## The introduction of new genres

### Propaganda songs

Songs have formed one of the most important aspects of Party propaganda, particularly but not only during the Cultural Revolution. Vast quantities of these songs were played over loudspeakers installed all across rural China during the 1960s and 1970s, and also on the radio. They were also taught to people in schools, political meetings and work groups in order to educate them in socialist ideals and Chinese language immediately after the first Chinese arrived in Tibet.<sup>29</sup> The vast majority of these songs were created through adding political texts to folk tunes gathered by Party workers who went ‘amongst the masses’, and then in the case of those broadcast over the radio and

<sup>26</sup> ‘Tibet’s March Towards Modernization’,

[http://www.bjreview.com.cn/2001/Document/Tibet%20March%20Toward%20Modernization\(B\).htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/2001/Document/Tibet%20March%20Toward%20Modernization(B).htm)

<sup>27</sup> A parallel situation occurred with the music of the minorities of the old Soviet bloc such as the Mongols. See Pegg 2001.

<sup>28</sup> See Ellen Judd, Ellen 1996 ‘Dramatic Conflict: Between State and Market in the Cultural Production of Theatre in Rural China’. *Culture* 16(2): 65-84.<sup>29</sup> TIN interview TIN 03-1316, 29 July 2003.

<sup>29</sup> TIN interview TIN 03-1316, 29 July 2003

loudspeakers, arranged with Western instruments, choruses and often Western harmonies in the conservatoire style. They are often described as ‘Revolutionary Folksongs’ (Ch: *geming gequ*), and are always included in anthologies of folk songs. They are described as being the spontaneous expression of the masses of their love for Mao and the Party but were in fact produced by the Party propaganda departments in combination with government cultural workers. These songs and their messages are described in more detail in chapter 4.

### Spoken drama

Spoken drama is a ‘Han importation’, brought into Tibet as part of the post-1959 reforms (traditional Tibetan drama, *Ache-Lhamo*, is all sung). It tends to follow the Party line far more closely than *Ache Lhamo*, effectively a form of propaganda. Spoken drama in Tibet was first introduced after a group of Tibetans were sent to be trained in Shanghai in this art form in 1960:

*Twenty-nine Tibetan students, handpicked for their correct class background and loyalty to the Chinese, were sent to the Shanghai Drama Institute to study. The institute established a “Tibetan nationality class” [...] and trained the group in performance, stage and costume design, and other arts of spoken drama.<sup>30</sup>*

The first performance of the class was in March 1962 and predictably consisted of Tian Han’s Chinese language play, *Princess Wencheng*, which tells of the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo’s marriage to the Chinese princess, Wencheng, basically the same story as *Gyasa Balsa*, but emphasising the character of the Chinese princess. The Tibetan Spoken-Drama Troupe was set up in July 1962 from this group of trainees, and later graduates of the Shanghai Drama Institute also joined in 1964 and 1981. This new form of drama was apparently not very popular in Tibet initially.

Spoken drama was also performed in Tibetan areas by Chinese touring companies, “*army theatrical units*” and non-military troupes “*sent by the Ministry of Culture*”, whose performances had blatant propaganda messages.<sup>31</sup> The army groups, made up of soldiers, have also been seen as serving a political purpose even more direct than that of propaganda, by forming a “*convenient though obvious guise to add military strength to areas of unrest*”.<sup>32</sup>

### Western classical music

Through the nationwide conservatoire system, elements of Western music such as instruments, operatic vocal style (especially with male singers) and harmony have come to form a part of the music of government dance troupes and the Party’s revolutionary ‘folksongs’.<sup>33</sup> However, these institutions, which were created in the 1950s, have spread Western classical music still further. Some dance troupe-trained musicians in Lhasa have

30 Mackerras 1998: 206

31 Meserve and Meserve 1979: 111

32 *ibid*: 111

33 Examples from all over China can be heard on the Cultural Revolution website <http://www.morningsun.org/multimedia/index.html#>, on ‘Listen to the radio’ or ‘watch television’.



Tibetan girl from the Tibet Song and Dance Ensemble playing piano'

reported being fond of Western classical music and operas, and composers such as Mozart and Beethoven. Tibetans have emerged as performers of western opera proper as opposed to Tibetan and Chinese songs sung with a Western operatic voice. One such singer, Dorje Tsering, reported:

*When I was studying at the Department Of Music of the Northwestern College I even tried the Italian vocal technique, but I did not regard it as my profession. After I started teaching in the University of Tibet following my graduation from university study in 1987, I found no people in Tibet singing with Italian vocal art. From that time I began paying much attention to this vocal art and to get to know western operas.<sup>34</sup>*

## Social change and musicians

One of the most significant developments in Tibetan musical culture that began to be brought in from the 1950s, via the dance troupes, has been the professionalisation of music. Traditionally in Tibet, the vast majority of musicians were amateur or only semi-professional, not earning their livings through performing, or only earning their living through performing for part of the year. Some musicians were tied forcibly into feudal arrangements, such as the *Gardrugpa*, who performed the *Gar* songs, dances and music for the Dalai Lama.<sup>35</sup> Tashi Tsering, a former *Gardrugpa* dancer in Tibet in the 1940s describes the cruelty they suffered in this role:

*[...] The teachers' idea of providing incentives [to learn] was to punish us swiftly and severely for each mistake. They constantly hit us on the faces, arms, and legs. They encouraged competition among us to spur us on. When we ran to line up at the beginning of morning, for example, the first boy in line got to punish the latecomers with a slap across the face. Each boy got to punish the*

<sup>34</sup> Tibet Daily 20 October 1996.

<sup>35</sup> See Goldstein, Siebenschuh and Tsering 1997 *The Struggle for Modern Tibet*: 11

*one below or behind him. It was terrible. I still have some of the scars from the almost daily beatings.*<sup>36</sup>

Yet together with the cruelty and a slave-like position, there was also an honour in their role. The 'Lord Chamberlain' (Tib: donyer chenmo) greeted the new *gadrugpa* trainees as follows:

*This is a glorious responsibility. You have all been chosen carefully from good families. From now on you must realize that you are special. The government will give you uniforms that no one else has the right to wear.*<sup>37</sup>

Professionalisation has largely led to a higher social status for musicians, something always mentioned in Chinese reports of progress in Tibet since 'liberation'. Wang Yao, for instance, in his book on Tibetan opera, states:

*In the feudal society of serfdom, the actors of the Tibetan opera led as miserable a life as other serfs. [...] They were menaced by starvation and diseases and suffered humiliation by officials and aristocrats.*<sup>38</sup>

In a report by *China Daily* in which four Tibetan performers are interviewed prior to a tour in Australia, one of the performers states the typical Party line: "*In the past, most Tibetan folk artists were beggars, but now they enjoy a much better life*".<sup>39</sup>

However, despite the official line that 'in the past, most Tibetan folk artistes were beggars', there are still itinerant performers in Tibet who fall outside the professional groups. TIN interviewed one such itinerant performer in 1997 who had left his village with his family and turned to this form of 'begging' in Lhasa because he was unable to make a living due to heavy taxes.<sup>40</sup> To term such itinerant performers 'beggars' is also somewhat misleading, since they are working and performing a service – that of entertainment – for which they are paid voluntary contributions by listeners. The derogatory term reflects more that these individuals fall outside of the Party's concept of modern society. That fewer Tibetan folk artistes are 'beggars' since 'liberation' is, at least in Lhasa, also due to the fact that all kinds of 'beggars' are arrested periodically, particularly prior to foreign visits or big festivals, in order to 'clean up' the city. The performer TIN interviewed had been arrested in 1996.<sup>41</sup>

Professionalisation has given many performers a new economic security. However, with the pressure on artistes from political campaigns, in particular during the Cultural Revolution, they received a new kind of insecurity and persecution. Even in the early 1980s, there was considerable anxiety amongst artistes about a possible return to the climate of the Cultural Revolution.

36 *ibid*: 17

37 *ibid*: 16

38 1986 *Tales from Tibetan Opera*: 12

39 "'Roof' Sounds Descend to Down Under", *China Daily* 19 November 2001.

40 TIN interview TIN 97-96, 21 October 1997.

41 *ibid*

## The Cultural Revolution: 1966-1976

The aim to 'develop' and 'integrate' Tibetan and other minority music through the introduction of Chinese styles, themselves heavily Western-influenced, brought profound changes to Tibetan music. However, Mao's dictum that art must serve socialism, support official policies, and 'develop' and 'raise the standard of the masses' was not applied with absolute strictness in the 1950s and early 1960s. Although bans on some minority music were implemented even before 1966, most music in Tibet was left untouched.<sup>42</sup> Virtually all music in the rural areas, and many songs and operas continued to praise or allude to religion, the Dalai Lama and other aspects of 'old' Tibet.

Mao's instructions for correct art and literature were taken to their logical extreme during the Cultural Revolution. This nationwide campaign was aimed at the total transformation, not just of society, but also of the hearts and minds of individuals. It was carried out by a frenzied and violent mob, Mao's Red Guards, with the intention of destroying or 'smashing' the 'Four Olds' (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits) and establishing the corresponding 'Four News'. What followed was one of the most repressive and destructive periods for the arts in the history of mankind.

Traditional music and the performing arts were banned, with rigorous enforcements of censorship, since they were seen to embody the old feudal, exploitative society. Although the Chinese authorities attempted to wipe out both Chinese and minority culture throughout the PRC, the most profound impact of the Cultural Revolution was on the minorities. All aspects of minority culture – religion, music, language, art etc. – were ruthlessly and relentlessly assimilated into that of the Han majority, or rather, a reformed Han identity that all minority nationalities were forced to dissolve into.

Mao (following Marx) interpreted national consciousness as essentially a class issue: with the end of class exploitation, national consciousness and the different ethnic identities it engenders will fade away. Whilst the Cultural Revolution was an expression of a single-minded pursuit of this utopia, with regard to minority culture, the movement was fuelled just as much by Han chauvinism. The culture and customs of the minorities were seen as the most backward and feudal, and were therefore the most urgently in need of reform. In this way the minorities could be completely assimilated into an ideal of a modern, socialist (Chinese) PRC.

Folk groups and musicians ceased to perform traditional music, "*the Tibetan Music-Drama Troupe disbanded for more than a year, and at other times performed arrangements of Tibetan-style Han 'model' plays such as The Story of the Red Lantern (Hongdeng ji)*".<sup>43</sup> During this period, not just the content of operas and songs were restricted, but the traditional style itself. The musical diet of not only the Tibetans but the entire population of the PRC for a period of ten years consisted of nothing but

<sup>42</sup> Tibetan opera, for example, "had more or less stopped by 1963 in the most important performing places of Central Tibet" (Henrion-Dourcy and Tsering (eds.) *The Singing Mask: Echoes of Tibetan Opera*, Lungta 15, winter 2001. Amnye Machen Institute: Dharamsala, India).

<sup>43</sup> Mackerras 1988: 203

revolutionary ‘folksongs’ in praise of Mao, the Party and socialism, and just eight model operas, created in the style of the sinicised Western music rather than regional traditions.

In a rare first-hand account of the Cultural Revolution, Pema Bhum, then a student at Malho Nationality Teachers Training School in Qinghai, describes how *la-shay*, a highly popular form of love song from Amdo, were banned in their school and how a climate of fear and mistrust was spread as a result of this censorship:

*Early one evening, one of the girls in our class burst into our dorm room short of breath. (...)*

*“The la-shay.... The la-shay... you need to hide the la-gzhas!” she stammered, gasping for air.*

*(...) she had just been cleaning a teacher’s room and on his desk had seen a note. It was a reminder to search each of the dorm rooms during the Saturday-inspection for any notebooks containing la-shay. (...)*

*Hearing the news we eyed each other with suspicion. How did the teachers and school officials know that we had la-shay? A student must have informed them. For all we knew, the traitor might live in this dorm. And so the seeds of distrust were sown. Every one of us had a la-shay collection. What should we do with our notebooks? (...)*

*As we cleaned the school grounds that Saturday, we noticed variously-sized piles of ashes from burnt paper in out-of-the-way places. We all knew these heaps of ashes were from the clandestine burnings of notebooks filled with la-shay, but no one mentioned seeing them.*

*When the teachers and school administrators saw the little mounds of ashes, they remarked, “That’s strange. What are these?”*

*To which the students simply echoed: “That’s strange. What are these?” ...*

*Within a few days, not a single la-shay notebook was seen among the students. Nor did we hear any mention of la-shay, much less the sound of la-shay being sung. It was as if the songs had never existed.<sup>44</sup>*

Whilst these students managed to avoid being caught with their *la-shay*, two others were not so lucky, and were exposed in front of the whole school and put under surveillance for one year with the threat of expulsion for any further incident. Many people received beatings during the Cultural Revolution for being caught defying the ban on singing traditional music. More common was a private defiance of the ban through continuing to

sing traditional music or singing anti-Chinese songs, usually with sentiments expressed in metaphoric language.<sup>45</sup> Alternatively, as Pema Bhum describes, people adapted their music to bring it in line with the rules, and in this way could hold onto at least elements of traditional music style, if not lyrics:

*Tibetan villagers found a way to keep their la-shay by changing the lyrics.  
A young man might court his sweetheart with the following:*

*You are a member of the Young Communist League,  
And I am a member of the Communist Party.  
This feeling we share is for Socialism<sup>46</sup>*

The Cultural Revolution caused unparalleled destruction throughout the PRC and especially Tibet, where the Chinese authorities were clearly intent on wiping out Tibetan culture. Musicians still struggle to regain what was lost during at least ten years of cultural annihilation. The Cultural Revolution is now officially discredited, and its extreme oppression of music and the arts has never been repeated since.<sup>47</sup> Today, enthusiastic appreciation and protection of the diverse arts of the Tibetans and other minorities and is official PRC doctrine. Yet, in practice these policies are implemented in a highly paternalistic and exoticising fashion and under strict control of the state.

Those dramatic destructions that took place until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 continue to determine exile Tibetan perceptions of contemporary Tibet. Any changes taking place in contemporary Tibet, such as the significant cultural renaissance in the arts, literature, and the influence of Chinese culture on Tibetan musicians, are thus widely perceived as further evidence of the ongoing PRC intention to destroy Tibetan culture. However, seen from a more objective standpoint, the real issue appears to be that Tibetan culture in Tibet and Tibetan culture in exile have both evolved, though not in the same direction. This duality has led to a sense of alienation on the part of exile Tibetans who believe that, for example, Tibetan music in Tibet is sinified and therefore not an authentic expression of Tibetan culture. There is no doubt that cultural change in Tibet is partly due to official policies, but reducing change to this mere political factor ignores both the influence of global mass media, and the prolific creativity of Tibetan artists and musicians in Tibet.

45 Such incidents of protest singing during the Cultural Revolution and in today's Tibet are described in chapter 5.

46 Bhum 2001: 115

47 The case of religion, again, is different, with vigorous campaigns taking place in the 1990s. See TIN publications *Cutting Off the Serpent's Head: Tightening Control in Tibet, 1994-1995* (1996) <http://www.tibetinfo.net/publications/bbp/bbp27.htm>, *Relative freedom? Tibetan Buddhism and Religious Policy in Kandze, Sichuan, 1987-1999* (1999)

<http://www.tibetinfo.net/publications/bbp/bbp33.htm>, *A Sea of Bitterness: Patriotic Education in Qinghai Monasteries* (1999)

<http://www.tibetinfo.net/publications/bbp/bbp32.htm>, *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the 10th Panchen Lama* (1998)

<http://www.tibetinfo.net/pl-opening.htm>, and Reports from Tibet: Religion <http://www.tibetinfo.net/reports/trrel.htm>. TIN's annual *News Reviews* of 1996-2001 and *Tibet 2002 – A Yearbook* also contain reports on religion.



## The end of the Cultural Revolution and ‘opening up’

### Policy change

The Cultural Revolution ended with Mao’s death in 1976, and soon after his wife and her allies, known as the ‘Gang of Four’, were arrested. This ‘Gang of Four’ and Lin Biao were blamed for all the destruction the Cultural Revolution had wrought.<sup>48</sup> This was a convenient way for the authorities to ‘save face’, condemn the disempowered leadership and introduce a new policy approach, which heralded a distinct period of liberalisation and freedom in the arts and culture without precedent since 1949.

In a speech greeting the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists on 30 October 1979,<sup>49</sup> Deng Xiaoping announced a return to pre-Cultural Revolution practice in the arts, and acknowledged the suffering of artistes and writers and the damage to art and literature during the period:

*In the 17 years before the Cultural Revolution, our line in literature and art was in the main correct and there were remarkable achievements. The allegation that our literature and art were then under the “dictatorship by the proponents of a sinister line” was nothing but slander on the part of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. During the 10 years when they ran riot, many outstanding works were proscribed, and many writers and artists framed and persecuted. A great number of our comrades and friends in literary and art circles resisted or fought against Lin Biao and the Gang with dignity and honour. Our writers and artists made admirable, lasting contributions in the struggle of the Party and the people to overthrow Lin Biao and the Gang. I salute them all.*

As is typical with Party speeches, Deng paid tribute to his ‘forefathers’, and reiterated most of the points made by Mao in his Talks of 1942, such as the idea that art and literature must strive to raise standards: “*While working for a socialist civilization which is materially advanced, we should build one which is culturally and ideological advanced by raising the scientific and cultural level of the whole nation and promoting a rich and diversified cultural life inspired by high ideals*”.

At the same time, however, he proudly celebrates the cultural diversity of the PRC, and places it, in principle, at the core of China’s post-Cultural Revolution minorities policy:

*China has a long history, a vast territory, and a huge population. Our people are of many nationalities and of different professions, ages, experience and educational levels, and they have varied customs and cultural traditions and varied preferences in literature and art. All creative works – whether epic or cameo, serious or humorous, lyrical or philosophical – should have their place*

48 For a more detailed discussion of the Cultural Revolution see Shakya 1999: 314-347.

49 Full text available on <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol2/text/b1350.html>

*in our garden of literature and art, so long as they help to educate and enlighten the people while providing them with entertainment and aesthetic pleasure.*

The national characteristics and culture of the minorities were no longer to be seen as backward, but were to be embraced by a PRC which is both tolerant and affectionate towards the cultural diversity of its different peoples. The nationalities were to be encouraged, yet contained under the umbrella of a multi-ethnic state. The shape this policy was to take in Tibet was narrated in a famous speech made by Hu Yaobang to the Cadres meeting in the TAR on 29 May 1980.<sup>50</sup> After witnessing the poverty and misery wrought by the Cultural Revolution in what should have been a Tibet glowing from 'liberation'.<sup>51</sup> Hu Yaobang goes as far as making a direct apology to the Tibetans, describing the Cultural Revolution as a "*catastrophe*", and expressing that Chairman Hua and the Vice-Chairmen "*felt very bad, and felt that our Party has let the Tibetan people down*".

The speech went on to outline six measures for Tibet and Tibetan culture to combat the extreme poverty of the region. In the first point, he asserted a commitment to the concept of autonomy, which despite being enshrined in the constitution was blatantly flouted during the Cultural Revolution and even before. The Tibetan autonomous areas should be autonomous in more than just name alone, with autonomy defined as "*the right to decide for oneself*", and he presented this autonomy as fundamental to the unity of the nationalities of the country as a whole:

*You Tibetan comrades like to eat butter and tsampa; as a southerner, I like to eat rice. If you abolish his right to decide to eat tsampa, and if you abolish my right to decide to eat rice, then we couldn't be united! ... Without the full exercise of self-government by the nationalities, there will be no great unity of the people of the whole country.*

The second, third and fourth points related to combating poverty and bringing about economic development in Tibet through various measures, and the last to increasing the percentage of Tibetan cadres in Tibet. The fifth measure focused on culture, science and education. Hu reiterated the need for the 'development' of Tibetan culture, but at the same time offered genuine praise, suggesting 'development' in the sense of revitalisation as much as in the sense of 'improving' it through the introduction of Han-style music conservatory techniques. He did not echo Mao's dictum that art must serve socialism, reflecting a shift in emphasis of art's aesthetic rather than distinct didactic value. He called for respect for Tibetans and their culture, attacked those who view Tibetans as 'backward', and asserted the need for Chinese cadres in Tibet to learn Tibetan and get to know the Tibetans and their culture.

*[...] Under the premise of upholding the socialist orientation, we should energetically and fully develop Tibetan science, culture and education. [...]*

<sup>50</sup> As published in *Zhongguo Shidai* April 1998.

<sup>51</sup> See Shakya 1999: 378-379.

*There are a few Han comrades who hold the incorrect view that Tibetans are backward. I do not agree with this - it is incorrect. Tibetan culture is extremely rich and its history is age-old; the Potala Palace is more than 300 years old and the Jokhang is more than 1,300 years old. Tibet has an age-old history and has a world-famous ancient culture and very good Buddhist scriptural studies.*

*[...] I have heard that documents, maps and registers in the temples have all been damaged, during these few years we haven't heard much good-sounding music, in the past there were a good few songs, called something like "Strolling in the new town", and there was something on offering the hada,<sup>52</sup> barley wine or something, and also that on Beijing's Jin Shan, it was really good. Why don't the broadcasting stations put these on the air now? I think they're very good, I am now of an advanced age and I still can't sing them and I couldn't do those dances. I think Tibet's dances are good. I think that Han cadres working in Tibet must study the Tibetan language, [you've been] doing this for ten or twenty years, but you are more or less like me, only knowing a few auspicious words such as "Tashi Delek". [...] I think that Han nationality cadres working in Tibet must study the Tibetan language, this should be obligatory, otherwise you will be separated from the masses. Saying that you should warmly love the minority nationalities is not just empty talk; you should respect their customs and habits, their language, their history and their culture.<sup>53</sup>*

However, amidst the praise and calls for respect, his statement also reflects the belittling, ethnocentric and inevitably paternalistic Chinese characterisation of Tibetans and other minorities as 'dancing and singing peoples':

*Tibet has exquisite music and dancing, sculpture, paintings, architecture and Tibetan medicine. I think that Tibet's music and dancing are much better than that of our Han nationality. Of course, we also have good music and dancing, we shouldn't be completely negative and underestimate our own capabilities. Speaking overall, I think that the music and dancing of the Tibetans, Mongolians, Uighurs and Koreans is better than that of the Han nationality. [...]*

In the 1980s, the policy of autonomy, respect and support for Tibetan culture was implemented to a hitherto unknown degree and brought about some real change, enabling a renaissance of traditional Tibetan culture. This renaissance did not last longer than a decade in the case of religion and education,<sup>54</sup> however, in the case of music and the performing arts, it lasted up to the present day. There are no official restrictions on 'unreformed' traditional music, although it is not actively encouraged by the state, but there are clearly restrictions on politically relevant content, especially when it comes to lyrics. At the same time, music continues to be adapted or 'reformed' to conform with or

<sup>52</sup> The Chinese spelling of *khatag*, the white ceremonial scarf that Tibetans present to people on special occasions.

<sup>53</sup> *Zhongguo Shidai* April 1998

<sup>54</sup> The political unrest in Tibet and Beijing in the late 80s led to the 'patriotic education' campaign, encouraging patriotism and de-emphasising the study of Tibetan culture and language in schools in the interests of state unity. See Catriona Bass 1998 *Education in Tibet: Policy and Practice Since 1950*: 54-58. London: Tibet Information Network and London and New York: Zed Books.

publicise the Party line for propaganda purposes and is also influenced by Han techniques through the medium of the professional dance troupes. Music is also being increasingly modernised and to a large extent sinicised through the spread of the mass media in Tibet and the emergence of a pop music culture. Although this popular music is largely a result of the loosening of state control, the government is aware of its potential for culturally integrating Tibet with the 'motherland', and encourages it in many ways.

## Cultural revival

Folk musicians and folk troupes began performing a few years after the fall of the 'Gang of Four' in October 1976, and traditional music began to be broadcast on the radio by the 1980s. The professional groups also re-emerged as well, and by 1984 there were eleven performing arts groups throughout the Tibet Autonomous Region.<sup>55</sup> The professional groups perform 'reformed' music, operas, and some spoken dramas, with significant Chinese influence, whereas the folk groups perform in a largely traditional style. The scholar Mackerras interviewed the leader of the Snow Amateur Tibetan Music-Drama Enterprise Cooperative in the 80s, who "*repeatedly and emphatically [said], obviously with pride, that his policy has been to perform plays completely 'unchanged from the old society'*", and that there were "*about two hundred folk groups similar to his in Tibet*".<sup>56</sup>

*Gar*, the ceremonial music and dance of the Dalai Lamas' court, was also revived in the mid-80s. It was performed for an official function in the 'People's Palace' (Tib: *Mimang Phodrang*) in front of the Potala Palace on 5 October 1982. However, this performance, probably naively considered as nothing more than the revival of another genre of traditional Tibetan music in the new era of openness and acceptance, was not received in the way intended by the authorities. *Gar* being intimately associated with the person and the institution of the Dalai Lama, its performance in Lhasa generated among listeners a powerful sense of a nearly physical presence of the Tibetan leader. The crowd became emotional, with many people moved to tears. Following this unexpected reaction, the authorities became suspicious of *gar*, and stopped encouraging its revival. It was never again performed at an official function.<sup>57</sup> The leader of the pre-1959 *gar* troupe, Pasang Dondrup, taught *gar* to students in Tibet University until 1991, but institutional support was finally withdrawn, largely due to lack of interest, and the fact that, considering their 'politically incorrect' effect on Tibetans, *gar* performances at official functions, festivals or parties did not appear convenient. *Gar* has largely vanished in Tibet itself, but is still performed in exile by the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA), which learned the *gar* repertoire from Pasang Dondrup, who travelled twice to Dharamsala in 1985 and 1997.<sup>58</sup>

55 Mackerras 1988: 203

56 *ibid*: 203.

57 Personal communication with Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, December 2003.

58 *ibid*

*Nangma* and *Toeshe*, the folk music of Lhasa and Shigatse, was also revived at the beginning of the 1980s. There were two arms to the revival. One, via the professional government troupes, represented the folk tradition, for example, through singers such as Chung Putri, born 1920, who had learned *Nangma* and *Toeshe* as an itinerant musician.<sup>59</sup> However, although authenticated through the link to the folk tradition and ‘the masses’, the government troupes perform these genres in ‘reformed’ styles to a greater or lesser degree, with Chinese influenced vocal techniques and added orchestral accompaniment to supplement or replace the traditional Tibetan ensemble of lute, dulcimer, fiddle and flute. The other arm of the *Nangma* and *Toeshe* revival was through the tradition of the literati, ex-aristocrats, most notably Sonam Dargyas Zholkhang of Tibet University, who have attempted to revive these genres in a traditional as opposed to ‘reformed’ style.<sup>60</sup>

Minority and Han festivals involving music were revived during the 1980s. The Lhasa *Shoton* festival of Tibetan opera was revived in 1986, and since then has taken place every year. The first amateur Music-Drama Festival also took place in Lhasa in May 1980. Summer horse racing festivals and other religious and secular festivals again started to take place and have become an important context for music making in Tibet. This and other aspects of the today’s musical culture are described in chapter 3.

Although after the end of the Cultural Revolution restrictions were lifted on traditional music (though lyrical content remains censored), the authorities were still able to exercise considerable control on music by their “enthusiastic” sponsorship of the arts: “[...] the CCP has been willing and able to control the type of arts revived and performed, to choose the artists, and to ensure the ideological suitability of anything that appears on



Shoton festival

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

60 Henrion-Dourcy 2001 Tibet, §III, 1 'Nang-ma': 455 in Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (eds.) *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edition): 452-455. London: Macmillan.



Shoton festival

*the stage. This remains the case [in the 1980s] despite the far greater breadth and variety in the arts of the 1980s as opposed to the decade from 1966 to 1976*<sup>61</sup>

The contradictions and limitations of the actual implementation of the new autonomy policy can be illustrated by the All-China Minority Nationalities Performing Arts Festival, which took place in 1980. This festival was aimed at exemplifying the new liberal policy towards the arts and the genuine autonomy that was to be given to the minority nationalities and their culture. It was introduced by a speech delivered by the then Minister of Culture, Huang Zhen. *“One observer praised the festival at which Huang Zhen made his speech specifically because ‘every nationality enjoyed an equal position’ in all activities, and among the 55 minorities ‘all had their own representatives and items taking part, no matter what the size of their population’. However, 34.8% of the performers of this minority national arts festival were Han”*.<sup>62</sup>

Whilst the state still retains a high degree of control and influence over Tibetan and other minority music making at the professional level, through the dance troupes and state-sponsored festivals, the influence on rural Tibet has been very limited. Ironically, today, it is the increasing role of market forces, rather than top-down policy, combined with the expanding popular and recorded music culture of Tibet and the PRC that is showing more signs of spreading Chinese style music into the Tibetan countryside.

61 Mackerras 1984: 215

62 *ibid*: 192