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Contents

Articles

- A Look at the Diversity of the Gzhan stong Tradition (24 pages)
– Anne Burchardi
- Beyond Anonymity: Paleographic Analyses of the Dunhuang Manuscripts (23 pages)
– Jacob Dalton
- “Emperor” Mu rug btsan and the *'Phang thang ma Catalogue* (25 pages)
– Brandon Dotson
- An Early Seventeenth-Century Tibeto-Mongolian Ceremonial Staff (24 pages)
– Johan Elverskog
- The Importance of the Underworlds: Asuras’ Caves in Buddhism, and Some Other Themes in Early Buddhist Tantras Reminiscent of the Later Padmasambhava Legends (31 pages)
– Robert Mayer
- Re-Assessing the Supine Demoness: Royal Buddhist Geomancy in the Srong btsan sgam po Mythology (47 pages)
– Martin A. Mills
- Modernity, Power, and the Reconstruction of Dance in Post-1950s Tibet (42 pages)
– Anna Morcom

Book Reviews

- Review of *Thundering Falcon: An Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra 'brug, Tibet's First Buddhist Temple*, by Per K. Sørensen et al (5 pages)
– Bryan Cuevas
- Review of *Tibetan Songs of Realization: Echoes from a Seventeenth-Century Scholar and Siddha in Amdo*, by Victoria Sujata (6 pages)
– Luran Hartley
- Review of *Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas*, ed. Rob Linrothe and Review of *The Flying Mystics of Tibetan Buddhism*, by Glenn H. Mullin (8 pages)
– Serinity Young

Modernity, Power, and the Reconstruction of Dance in Post-1950s Tibet

Anna Morcom

Royal Holloway College, University of London

Abstract: *This article traces the changes and transformations of Tibetan dance that have occurred since 1950. It looks at how agents of change ranging from small groups of Tibetans to the Chinese state create, negotiate, and represent different kinds of Tibetan modernities through reconstructions and reconfigurations of Tibetan dance, and it examines how dance is modernized, the kinds of modernity represented, and the social and political power dynamics involved. In particular, the article looks at the repercussions on dance of the recent state-sponsored economic development of Tibet that has resulted in the formation of new urban middle classes but also a dramatic growth in disparity. It also examines the impact on dance culture of the growth of heterogeneous communities in the increasingly mobile population of contemporary Tibet. The article further addresses the issue of globalization, which sees new layers being added to the social and cultural hierarchies of twenty-first century Tibet.*

Introduction

During 1950-51, the People's Liberation Army entered and gained control of Tibet,¹ and it became de facto a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Despite drastically diverging views as to whether the arrival of the People's Liberation Army is to be considered an act of "liberation" or one of "invasion," it is undeniable that a new order began in Tibet at this point, a break with the past. Intensification of contacts with an increasingly fast-changing world outside Tibet at least since the late nineteenth century had already induced a "modernization" of Tibet in the sense that new technical facilities began to spread and new social or political ideas emerged.² However, unlike early twentieth-century China, this did not result in

¹ For brevity's sake, "Tibet" refers to the culturally Tibetan areas of the PRC.

² See Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989) for a general history of the first half of the twentieth century in Tibet. Accounts of a number of early Tibetan reformists and their activities have been

any large-scale reform movement in Tibet.³ Therefore, a more marked onset of “modernity” began with the arrival of the Chinese, when “modern” notions of science, “development,” “evolution,” and “progress” were applied on an unprecedented scale and intensity to Tibetan society and culture, and were accompanied by road building and mass media and communications.⁴ This modernity brought to Tibet was also intimately linked to a nationalist agenda and an agenda reflecting the Chinese version of Marxism, in particular in the period up to the 1980s. Essential to this agenda was the integration of the newly annexed Tibet into China, or rather the “New China,” and the redefinition or subordination of the Tibetan people as a “minority nationality.”

With the death of Mao and Maoist ideology and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, a new phase of PRC history began. A string of economic and market reforms and the relaxation of the ban on private ownership and commerce first instigated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 led to the emergence of a market economy, triggering a rapidly expanding commercial culture and proliferation of the mass media, increasingly linking China with the rest of the world. This transformed Tibet most dramatically after 1999, when the Western Development Drive led to a state-fueled economic boom in Tibet and other western regions of the PRC.⁵ Whilst rural-urban migration has occurred across China, in Tibet it has

published. Some well known examples of figures from different regions of Tibet are biographies/autobiographies of Dge 'dun chos 'phel (Heather Stoddard, *Le mendiant de l'Amdo* [Paris: Société d'ethnographie, 1985]), Bkra shis tshe ring (Melvyn Goldstein, William Siebensschuh, and Tashi Tsering, *The Struggle for Modern Tibet: The Autobiography of Tashi Tsering* [New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997]), and Ba pa phun tshogs dbang rgyal (Melvyn Goldstein, Dawei Sherap, and William Siebensschuh, *A Tibetan Revolutionary: The Life and Times of Bapa Phüntso Wangyal* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004]). See also A blo, *A blo spun mched kyi rnam thar* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994), a biography of the Fifth 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa by his elder brother, another well-known early Tibetan reformer and communist.

³ See Han Kuo-Huang, “The Introduction of Western Music in Modern Times,” in *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music*, vol. 7, *East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea*, ed. Robert Provine, Yoshihiko Tomumaru and J. Lawrence Witzleben (New York: Garland Pub., 2002), 373-77, for an account of this period of reform in China as it related to music and the arts.

⁴ See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Carl Freedman, *The Incomplete Projects: Marxism, Modernity, and the Politics of Culture* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, reprint 2005); and John Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) for a range of general, theoretical readings on modernity. The arrival of the Chinese tends to be seen in a rather oversimplified way as marking the beginning of “modernity” in Tibet due to the proclamation of it as such by the Chinese government with the heralding of the “new society” and the vilifying of “backward old Tibet,” which continues to this day. The idea that modernity (in a negative sense) exists in Tibet only because of China has also been supported by the exile establishment and western world, which romanticize a timeless, traditional Tibet that has been destroyed by China.

⁵ There were development initiatives in Tibetan areas before 1999 but nothing on the scale of the Great Development of the West (*xibu da kaifa*), first announced in June 1999 by Jiang Zemin. See Tibet Information Network, *News Review: Reports from Tibet, 1999* (London: Tibet Information Network, 2000), 113-17 for Jiang Zemin's and others' speeches on western development, and Tibet Information Network, *China's Great Leap West* (London: Tibet Information Network, 2000) for a study of the beginnings of the Western Development Drive. See Andrew Fischer, *State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet: Challenges in Recent Economic Growth* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2005) for a book-length study of economic development in Tibet based on both fieldwork

had an ethnic angle, since in addition to rural Tibetans, large numbers of Chinese have also migrated to Tibetan cities for work, largely from Chinese regions bordering the Tibetan areas.⁶ Chinese from the wealthy east coast and westerners have also begun to arrive in Tibet in large numbers following the boom in tourism, particularly in the last few years.⁷ From the first few years of the new millennium, the “global flows” of “mediascapes,” “ethnoscapes,” “technoscapes,” and “financescapes” have definitively reached Tibet,⁸ although “ideoscapes” remain tightly controlled by the one-party state in its continued resistance to the trope of “modernity as democracy”⁹ and the control of separatism in Tibet.

While the Maoist, revolutionary period ended (in)famously with performing arts culture narrowed down more or less to revolutionary songs and eight model operas, in the Tibet of the twenty-first century, Britney Spears, MLTR’s “Take Me to Your Heart,” and Bollywood dance and songs are performed live in larger urban centers alongside the Tibetan and Chinese pop which has existed since the 1980s, and people dance with abandon to techno in discos and *nang ma* (nightclub)

and analysis of macroeconomic data. See also the economy/development sections of Tibet Information Network, *Tibet 2002: A Yearbook* (London: Tibet Information Network, 2003), Tibet Information Network, *News Review: Reports from Tibet, 2000* (London: Tibet Information Network, 2001), Tibet Information Network, *News Review: Reports from Tibet, 2001* (London: Tibet Information Network, 2002), Tibet Information Network, *Tibet 2003: A Yearbook* (London: Tibet Information Network, 2004), Tibet Information Network, “National Autonomy Law Revised to Support Western Development Policy,” Phayul.com, <http://www.tew.org/development/autonomy.law.html> (originally published on Tibet Information Network, “News Update,” March 13, 2001; site now discontinued), and Tibet Information Network, “ADB Supports Western Development Drive, but Not in Tibet,” Phayul.com, <http://www.tew.org/development/asia.devel.bank.html> (originally published on Tibet Information Network, “News Update,” March 30, 2005; site now discontinued) for more information relating to the Western Development Drive.

⁶ Fischer, *State Growth and Social Exclusion*. Significant numbers of Chinese have also settled in the low, fertile rural areas of southern and eastern Tibet, Kong po and southern Kham, some from as early as the 1950s.

⁷ Tourism became an economic focus in Tibet in the early 1980s, but the scope was limited due to lack of facilities and infrastructure.

⁸ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.

⁹ The idea that modernization necessarily involves democratization and a focus on individual rights is assumed by the western world. See, for example, the discussion of modernity and Indian modernity, which inherited much from the western tradition, in Avijit Pathak, *Modernity, Globalization and Identity: Towards a Reflexive Quest* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2006).

bars in county towns.¹⁰ Cassette and VCD¹¹ players are found in villages across Tibet, with the exception of the most remote areas still not reached by electricity.¹² Although before the arrival of the Chinese in Tibet a mixing of different regional styles of song and dance and some non-Tibetan styles had occurred at least through religiously motivated travel and migration,¹³ the changes since the 1950s are undeniably of an unprecedented order.

This article traces the changes and transformations of dance that have occurred since 1950 by looking at how agents of change ranging from small groups of Tibetans to the Chinese state create, negotiate, and represent different kinds of Tibetan modernities through reconstructions and reconfigurations of Tibetan dance, and also by examining how dance is modernized, the kinds of modernity represented, and the social and political power dynamics involved. Although this article draws on fieldwork in a range of Tibet's regions as well as areas of varying levels of urbanization, given the size of Tibet and the relatively small quantity of existing research on any aspect of Tibetan performing arts, there will inevitably be shortfalls in this attempt to comment on major trends in contemporary Tibet.¹⁴

¹⁰ I witnessed dancing to techno in a number of county towns of Dkar mdzes Prefecture (Dar rtse mdo, Li thang, Dkar mdzes, and the remote Gser shul), and also Rma chu County in Gannan Prefecture. Bollywood and western pop are performed live more in the big cosmopolitan cities with Tibetan population – Lha sa, Chengdu and Xining (all province capitals) – and also in prefecture capitals (Nag chu, Brtse thang, and probably Gzhis ka rtse, although I did not visit bars there) as well as 'Gram (the county on the border with Nepal). However, I know a Tibetan singer who performs western pop who was invited to perform in a *nang ma* bar in a remote county of Lho kha, and who performed spontaneously in many *nang ma* bars she visited with me across Khams and A mdo, and also in her own village in A mdo. Popular and cutting edge singers (such as those who can perform well in Hindi or English) get paid very well to make special appearances in *nang ma* bars in often remote places, with owners scouting talent in Lha sa and other big cities. Networks of performers and *nang ma* bar owners also fuel the spread of styles to different areas of Tibet.

¹¹ Neither VHS nor DVD technology made significant impact in Tibet; the VCD (Video Compact Disc) remains the standard medium of release of music after audio cassettes.

¹² Not all villages in Tibet had electricity when I visited in 2004-2005, though probably the majority did. It appears that electricity arrived in most villages during the 1980s.

¹³ Anna Morcom, "History, Traditions, Identities, and Nationalism: Drawing and Redrawing the Musical Cultural Map of Tibet," *PIATS 2006* (forthcoming). This dynamism and hybridity of "traditional" Tibetan musical culture is glossed over/denied by essentialist and politically motivated conceptions and representations of "old Tibet" inside and outside of China.

¹⁴ I would like to warmly thank the Leverhulme Trust for their generous support of a year's fieldwork in Tibet from 2004-2005 under the Study Abroad Studentship scheme, which has provided the basis of this article. I would also like to thank all the singers and dancers I learned from and spent time with in Tibet, who made my fieldwork both a fascinating and fun experience. The research consisted of a mixture of formal and informal meetings and interactions with dancers, musicians and people involved with dance and music, some filming and recording, and a large degree of participant observation, the major parts of which were learning: Lha sa *nang ma* and *stod gzhas* dance with Dpal sgron lags, formerly a teacher from Tibet University, in Lha sa; the modern/dance troupe style of dance in Lha sa with G.yu sgron, a dancer/choreographer/singer in Lha sa *nang ma* bars and member of the Lha mo tshogs pa; new-style *sgor bro* over many nights in *nang ma* bars across Tibet and briefer periods in town squares in Khams and A mdo; (briefly) 'ba' *gzhas* in 'Ba' thang with Blo bzang tshes ring; and A mdo *rdung len* songs and mandolin with Bstan 'dzin in Lha sa and A mdo, resulting in a commercially released VCD, *Sprin gyi me tog*, Anna Morcom, VCD ISRC CN-H01-06-320-00/V, 2006. I planned expeditions to certain areas in order to study particular genres in their contemporary context and to gain a view of rural versus urban, big city versus small town etc., and different regions. I also made more spontaneous

However, it is hoped that in particular, this article will contribute to an understanding of the social, economic, and cultural changes taking place in Tibet's newest phase of modernity of the twenty-first century, and more generally, of the possibilities and particularities of the role of performing arts in local and national cultural change and modernity.

Post-1950s Tibet, State Modernity

Chairman Mao was well aware of music and other arts as an active force in the creation of identity and culture, and thereby a crucial building block for the new society. In 1942 he stated, "There is a cultural as well as an armed front," and "a cultural army ... is indispensable in achieving unity amongst ourselves and winning victory over the enemy."¹⁵ The musical styles of the 1950s were a product and a reminder of the "old society," and distinctive ethnic styles were potential signifiers of the cultural distinctness of these minorities and hence a fragmentary force on the new unified PRC, especially in the case of the newly annexed Tibet. The traditions of music and dance of all nationalities of China, including the Tibetans, were uniformly reformed and "developed" through a centralized network of Han Chinese training institutions and dance troupes, the basis of which were western-style conservatoires set up during China's turn-of-the-nineteenth-century drive to reinvent itself as a modern nation in reaction to humiliation by foreign powers. Ironically, this was done by adopting the "scientific," "developed" western techniques, styles, and training systems of these foreign powers.¹⁶ Whilst these overarching concepts of cultural modernity originating from western ideas dated from the beginning of the twentieth century in China, they were first institutionalized in Tibet by the Chinese. The new style created by these institutions in all regions of the PRC expressed and performed two points of key political importance to the new China:

expeditions to various places led by fortuitous contacts with singers and dancers and other friends. The article also draws on an involvement with Tibetan performing arts in exile and diaspora Tibetan communities dating from 1990. I emphasize that the interpretations of change in Tibetan musical culture contained in this article are my own, and my own responsibility. I would also like to thank Thierry Dodin and Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy for their invaluable input on drafts of this article.

¹⁵ Bonnie McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talk at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980), 57. See *Unity and Discord: Music and Politics in Contemporary Tibet* (London: Tibet Information Network, 2004), 13-30, for a more lengthy analysis of the shaping of Tibetan music in general by Chinese nationalist and Maoist ideology. See Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, "Ache Lhamo: Jeux et enjeux d'une tradition théâtrale tibétaine" (PhD thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2004), for a detailed account of Tibetan opera, including its post-1950s history. For an account of the process of Chinese modernization of the musics of other minority nationalities of China see Helen Rees, *Echoes of History: Naxi Music in Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10-27, 130-69, and Rachel Harris, *Singing the Village: Music, Memory and Ritual Among the Sibe of Xinjiang* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2004), 156-93.

¹⁶ Kuo-Huang, "Introduction of Western Music."

1. The “unity of the nationalities,” through the unification of historically and ethnically diverse styles as they were all glossed with the same brush of the Han Chinese modernization.
2. The creation of a new style for the new nation, presenting itself as “developed” due to the use of “scientific” training systems and professional training and performance. Following in the long tradition of the “civilizing” and controlling of non-Han peoples by the Han Chinese,¹⁷ but fueled with new socialist ideology, the “raw material” of folk music and dance was turned into “art,” “developing” and “raising the standards” of the “backward” masses/minorities.¹⁸

Through its embodiment of the explicitly named “new society,” its profound reformation of the old, and the near-total censorship of anything else for at least ten years during the Cultural Revolution, this style created and defined music and dance modernity in Tibet. The state therefore created a modernity expressed as *development, improvement, refinement, civilizing, and sinicization pitted against the unmodernized (“traditional”) and non-Han Chinese as backward.*

Although there was no genre of pan-Tibetan dance prior to the 1950s – instead, there were more or less linked regional styles – and certain broad elements common to all regional styles were uniformly modified to create a genuinely new style and a new set of norms.¹⁹ The key changes in terms of style were as follows:

1. *The adoption of a modified vocal style*, as professional Tibetan singers were retrained in bel canto or Chinese styles.
2. *The use of orchestras and large ensembles*, whereas traditional Tibetan dances are mostly accompanied by the singing of the dancers or a single or small group of instruments.

¹⁷ Thomas Heberer, “Old Tibet a Hell on Earth? The Myth of Tibet and Tibetans in Chinese Art and Propaganda,” in *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies*, ed. Thierry Dodin and Heinz R  ther (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 113-21, Harris, *Singing the Village*, 1-15, and *Unity and Discord*, 13-30 discuss these issues in relation to music.

¹⁸ Terminology from Mao’s talks; see McDougall, *Mao’s “Talk at the Yan’an Conference.”*

¹⁹ See Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, “Women in the Performing Arts: Portraits of Six Contemporary Singers,” in *Women in Tibet, Past and Present* (London: C. Hurst, 2005), especially 198-201, and Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy and T. Dhondup, “Tibet, §III, 1. Folk music,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 2001), 449-52 for general information on the character of traditional Tibetan performing arts.



Figure 1: Tibetan choir sings in a festival in Dar rtse mdo, May 2005.

3. *Ballet as a basis for all dance and ballet training for all dancers*, resulting in a stretched body posture, a lightness of movement, and bigger movements, with hands reaching high above the head. With traditional Tibetan dance, the body is relaxed, often slightly stooped, the hands do not reach above the head,²⁰ and the movements are heavier with a lower center of gravity.



Figure 2a: Traditional style group dance from a village near Dar rtse mdo.

4. *Increased complexity and “sophistication”*: most Tibetan traditional dances are group-participative, performed by non-professionals and with little variation of steps (but long song texts), making them, by the standards of the dance troupe aesthetics, inadequate to constitute dance as “art” since they are only “raw material” for “art.”²¹ A greater variety of steps was therefore introduced in all dances, mixing the steps of one dance with those from different regions and integrating newly composed moves and

²⁰ The Khams pa dances of Yul shul and Rdza chu kha appear to be an exception with big arm moves that seem to predate the post-1950s modifications according to older performers. See Henrion-Dourcy, “Ache Lhamo,” 393-411 for a detailed description of the movements of *a ce lha mo*, the most detailed description available for any Tibetan theater or dance form.

²¹ Mao’s terminology, see McDougall, *Mao’s “Talk at the Yan’an Conference.”*

ballet moves. The dances are performed in complex formations rather than the traditional circle, and tend to be multi-sectional compositions.



Figure 2b: County-level dance troupe perform in Nag chu, 2004.

5. *The separation of song and dance:* As Henrion-Dourcy and Dhondup state, “Dances are invariably associated with singing, but not all songs are danced to.”²² However, as Tibetan performing arts were made to fit into the cast of western-style Chinese conservatoires, performers were highly trained in either song or dance but not both.
6. *Audience-oriented stage performance,* with an emphasis on virtuosity and slick, professional, flawless, showy performance.



Figure 3a: Heavy winter Tibetan clothes in rural A mdo.

²² Henrion-Dourcy and Dhondup, “Tibet, §III, 1. Folk music,” 449.

7. *Brightly colored, floaty costumes*: traditional Tibetan clothes consist of heavy wool, brocade, animal skins,²³ and very large ornaments that can weigh, at a guess, from one kilogram to over ten. This change in costumes makes a “lighter” style possible, linked to the ballet aesthetic and drive to virtuosity, though less heavy and hot clothes are also a necessity to some extent for indoor stage performance. Uniform costumes as opposed to clothes were also introduced.



Figure 3b: Traditional ornaments of Nag chu nomads.

outside of the interlocking world of Tibetan regional styles.²⁵

Second, the state modification of Tibetan dance in this way created the first overarching concept of pan-Tibetan dance, in contrast to the linked but regionally distinct styles and identities of pre-1950s Tibet. Apart from a few regional genres which are more or less recognizable – *'ba' gzhaz* from southwest Kham, Tibetan lute (*sgra snyan*) dance from Lha sa and Dbus gtsang, Kong po Tibetan lute dance – most of the state conservatoire Tibetan dances involve mixtures of elements from different regions plus balletic or new Tibetan-style moves and are difficult to place regionally. Smaller troupes at the county level do perform varying degrees of local repertoire, though almost always in the state style.²⁶ However, the troupes still tend to learn a central repertoire via teachers who have been trained in the state conservatoires, and more recently, from watching television and VCDs. Therefore, in addition to the modification with the pan-China style, there is incomparably

²³ In one of the most dramatic demonstrations of sentiment in Tibet since the late 1980s, following a strong plea by the Dalai Lama in India in January 2006 to Tibetans in Tibet not to wear endangered animal skins, incidents of fur-burning spread across the Tibetan areas, and by summer 2006 animal pelts had disappeared from the clothes of ordinary Tibetans, though sheepskin dresses/coats and lamb fleece lining are still worn. See <http://www.tibetfonet.net/> for reports and images. During summer 2006, I saw elaborate brocade borders being worn for best clothes instead of fur at the Li thang Horse Race Festival.

²⁴ See note 13.

²⁵ While styles changed, migrated, and interacted with other styles, traditional regional styles are certainly not conceived as being mixed (*'dres ma*). Therefore, it can be argued that the ideological acceptance of hybridity began at this point. I am grateful to Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy for this point.

²⁶ The county troupes may also perform dances where none existed in the area before the 1950s, such as Rma chu county dance troupe.

more cross-regional standardization of repertoire than there was before the 1950s. The state thus created a form of national Tibetan dance, but one that was strictly a subset of the new China's performing arts: a semi-homogenized block easy to rationalize as a part of China, a clear message, to be repeatedly performed, of Tibet as "an inalienable part of China."²⁷ This can be contrasted with the Tibetan national style created in exile, the "dances of the roof of the world" phenomenon, which performs Tibet as a unified series of regions with Lha sa at their center.²⁸

In the embodiment of the explicitly named "new society," the blanket reformation of the old, the accompanying banning or heavy repression in Tibet of "traditional" performing arts unless carrying propaganda lyrics from the 1950s until 1980, and the propagation of this style alone through the state-controlled media (radio, loudspeakers, film, and limited television), the state style solely constituted musical and dance modernity in Tibet and China. This meant therefore



Figure 3c: Shop in Chengdu selling floaty, exotic costumes for dance troupes and nang ma bars.

that until the 1980s, modernity in Tibet became sinicization, a creation of Chinese nationalism monolithically defined by the Chinese state. All other aspects of modernity (media, technology, communications) were used to serve the state's purpose and strictly censored; as China shut itself and in particular Tibet off to the outside world, relationships with other cultures were either terminated (for example, the centuries-old trade and religious interactions of Tibet with India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia) or mediated strictly by the state (for example ballet, opera, and other aspects of western and Soviet classical music and dance entered Tibet only via Chinese state conservatoires); and Han Chinese communists or Tibetan communists whose views were acceptable to the Han Chinese state were the only real agents of change, with no participation of the Tibetan masses.

²⁷ Compare this to corporate America's representation of global diversity and harmony in the "Small World" ride at Disneyland Paris in Laudan Nooshin, "Circumnavigation with a Difference? Music, Representation and the Disney Experience: It's a Small, Small World," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 12, no. 2 (2004): 236-51.

²⁸ Morcom, "History, Traditions, Identities, and Nationalism." The exile representation of Tibet is beyond the scope of this article, but it must be pointed out that the exile administration is overwhelmingly dominated by central Tibetans, and while they represent Tibet's regional diversity in many ways in performance, they also perform everything in a more or less Lha sa dialect, and all modern songs are sung in Lha sa dialect. See Morcom, "History, Traditions, Identities, and Nationalism" for an analysis of exile Tibetan style in performance by the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA).

State and Other Modernities in Regional and Popular Culture in Post-1980s Tibet

While the state singularly created and controlled performing arts modernity in the revolutionary period, by the late 1980s, the state style seemed increasingly old-fashioned, stilted, and obsolete. Modernity had “moved on,” leaving the state behind. With restrictions on private ownership lifted, broadcast and new forms of mass media (cassettes and later VCDs) began to spread, though with limited effect, especially in the countryside, until the late 1990s and the new millennium. With the censorship on anything but the “correct” revolutionary content lifted, there were revivals of traditional performing arts, and forms of musical performance born out of other modernities were able to enter Tibet in a more aesthetically pluralistic popular sphere with increasing interaction with the private, non-governmental realm.²⁹ In the 1980s, karaoke bars with Taiwanese and Hong Kong pop music swept Lha sa, and in the late 1980s and 1990s, immensely popular songs in this style were performed in the Tibetan language, the most famous singers being Zla sgron, Byams pa tshe ring, and Bde chen dbang mo. While rock music swept China in the 1980s, a Tibetan hard (as opposed to soft) pop style with big vocals and a very wide range (echoing traditional Tibetan nomadic singing) was introduced by Yar ’drong during the early 1990s. From a more rural context, in the early 1980s came *rdung len*, songs in A mdo Tibetan dialect accompanied by mandolin and increasingly nowadays with synthesized music and a beat.³⁰ While Tibetan pop music began in the late 1980s, it has greatly increased in scale and become more commercialized since the late 1990s, with the economic boom in Tibet and the proliferation of the mass media and entertainment venues (discussed below). Other styles of popular music have also emerged in the new millennium: more western-style rock bands particularly in Lha sa (some very similar to the model of pop music found amongst Tibetan exiles in India and Nepal), African-American influenced pop (such as Chung zhol sgron ma), and a current plethora of highly stylized and choreographed girl bands and boy bands. All these

²⁹ See Nimrod Baranovitch, *China’s New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender and Politics, 1978–1997* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003) for a discussion of this with reference to mainland China. The sense of an “independent” popular music scene in Tibet is problematic even now. Popular and recorded music in Tibet initially emerged from government institutions in the case of Lha sa (for the TAR) and A mdo, with the biggest stars, such as Zla sgron and Byams pa tshe ring, on government payroll or close to the government. Many of Tibet’s most famous singers continue to come from state troupes and conservatoires, including most of the A mdo singers. However, the market has opened up to singers outside the government realm, and singers inside the government realm have been free to integrate outside influences in their music, as Zla sgron did with Taiwanese pop music. See Anna Morcom, “Getting Heard in Tibet: Music, Media and Markets,” in *Consumption, Markets and Culture* (forthcoming).

³⁰ Institutionally speaking, *rdung len*, like Lha sa’s first pop music, also emerged from government recording offices and dance troupes, with government personnel acting as key composers and lyric writers (there were no private recording studios in the 1980s). However, it was certainly a new, local Tibetan phenomenon with close links to traditional styles rather than a Beijing creation. See Morcom, “Getting Heard in Tibet.”

new styles – with the exception of *rdung len*, which is sung only in Tibetan – are sung in both Tibetan and Chinese.

Appadurai's words seem to encapsulate this process: "we can see that electronic mass mediation and transnational mobilization have broken the monopoly of autonomous nation-states over the project of modernization."³¹ However, while the *monopoly* of the state was indeed broken, the influence of the state has by no means been overwhelmed. In fact, rather than becoming a specter of the discredited revolutionary past, in many ways the state style is leading perceptions and expressions of modernity in dance at far deeper levels of the population than in the period prior to 1980. Paradoxically, the state is achieving an influence and control on popular culture in the new climate of economic liberalization and "hands-off" cultural policy that it never managed to achieve through heavy repression and censorship.³² While the popular culture of the 1980s and early 90s was certainly radical (sad songs, some romantic, of loss, pain, and longing versus happy revolutionary songs, and a new lyrical style expressing Tibetan identity grounded in Tibetan experience and emotion rather than "correct" state representations),³³ there is a large section of the popular culture from the late 1990s that conforms to the state style.

The Meeting of State and People

While by the 1980s the revolutionary ideology may have been outdated even from the point of view of the party, the 1950s state performing arts style (and within it the culturally-coded ideologies of ethnicity and "development") was able not only to stay up to date, but to become a key reference point for core popular culture in the twenty-first century and also for the performance of "traditional" genres in the modern world down to the grassroots level. In a compromise and ideological backtrack, the state has, since the end of the Cultural Revolution, started not only to tolerate other forms of modern performing arts but to actually promote many aspects of the new "independent" popular culture that emerged from the 1980s through its troupes and state television. In the first instance this has given the state a more trendy and people-friendly image. More importantly, through a process of inclusion and appropriation, it is the state that represents and in a sense claims or "patents" these potentially threatening forms of modernity rather than being undermined by them. It is also in this way able to exert more direct forms of control, through, for example, not allowing performers to address (TV or live) audiences, and restricting live performances in particular by artists with big followings amongst the masses.³⁴ State dance troupes now feature people singing pop songs in rock or

³¹ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 10.

³² See *Unity and Discord*, 137-78, for a discussion of censorship and protest songs in post-Cultural Revolution Tibet.

³³ See Henrion-Dourcy, "Women in the Performing Arts," for a description of Zla sgron and the significance of sad songs in the context of this era in Tibet.

³⁴ Baranovitch, *China's New Voices*. Bdued be, the unparalleled A mdo *rdung len* singer, sang in Lhasa in July 2006 at the new two-thousand-person capacity venue of Thang go la. To control the emotional

Taiwan style and with Tibetan lyrics as well as Chinese (although Chinese lyrics tend to dominate), traditional songs or songs closer to traditional styles (such as nomad songs [*'brog glu*] and *rdung len*), and the new more global-style girl bands and boy bands. Explicitly Chinese nationalist and political material has been greatly reduced in the performances of state troupes, but it has not disappeared (see figures 4a and 4b, which are photos of a lengthy dramatic performance by the Dkar mdzes Prefecture dance troupe of the crossing of the Luding bridge on the Long March on the seventieth anniversary of this occasion).



Figure 4a: Crossing of Luding bridge drama by Dkar mdzes dance troupe, May 2005.

Since around 1990, singers may be members of dance troupes in addition to making private albums and performing for personal profit at festivals and on television, and successful singers are invited to perform for variety shows on Tibetan TV for occasions such as New Year or the Yogurt Festival (*zho ston*) in Lha sa. The most famous pop stars who have achieved nationwide fame (and sing mostly in Chinese) may occasionally appear in the variety shows on Chinese mainland television. These shows feature Chinese pop stars and glitzy, spectacular dances. They are broadcast across China (including Tibet) on CCTV3 and other channels, featuring dancers largely belonging to state institutions, though singers may be independent. In this way, the realms of “state,” “popular,” and “traditional” music have become blurred, and the state’s cultural activities, rather than being explicitly and crudely political as in the revolutionary period, now seem just cultural.

However, whilst the state is vigorously appropriating “popular” culture, “the people” can be seen to be actively appropriating the state style. I will examine two examples of this, one urban and one rural. *Nang ma* bars, which started around 1997, were originally drinking houses in Lha sa where traditional music from Lha sa known as *nang ma* was performed along with other



Figure 4b: Crossing of Luding bridge drama by Dkar mdzes dance troupe, May 2005.

reaction of the almost entirely Tibetan audience, the consumption of alcohol was not allowed, whereas usually *nang ma* bars like Thang go la (see below) are places to go to drink as much as to listen to music. In this way, we see the political power of Tibetan music, and the policy of the authorities to contain and control rather than censor. Even performers who do step outside the mark, for example with lyrics, tend nowadays to be contained rather than arrested, which tends to greatly increase their popularity (as happened with the A mdo singer Nam mkha’, arrested around 2003).

genres.³⁵ They rapidly spread across Tibet and are now found in all big cities (prefecture and province capitals in Tibetan areas) and some county towns.³⁶ As a result of their immense success, they rapidly became commercialized and competed for better singers and dancers and better, slicker, flashier shows. While there are countless extremely proficient non-professional performers of regional genres in the countryside in Tibet, the state dance troupes provide a consistent standard of staged, slick, showy, professional, costumed performance that exists little in traditional musical culture, especially dance.³⁷ *Nang ma* bars hence started to draw from dance troupe singers, dancers, dance teachers, and choreographers, some remaining in their dance troupe but supplementing their unlavish state salary by performing in the *nang ma* bar in the evening and others moving permanently into the private sphere.³⁸ Shambhala, for example, the most expensive *nang ma* bar in Gannan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, is staffed almost exclusively by moonlighting members of the two Gannan Prefecture dance troupes.³⁹ G.yung drung rgyal's *nang ma* bar, which opened in 2005 and quickly achieved the status of the best *nang ma* bar in Lha sa, has a large troupe of around ten female

³⁵ See also Adams, "Karaoke as Modern Lhasa, Tibet: Western Encounters with Cultural Politics," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 4 (1996): 510–46, on karaoke and *nang ma* bars.

³⁶ Lha sa has many *nang ma* bars; Chengdu and Xining, the capital cities of Sichuan and Qinghai, the provinces with the biggest Tibetan areas after the TAR, both have several; and there are also two or more that I visited in Nag chu, Gzhis ka rtse, Brtse thang, Gannan, Dar rtse mdo, and Yul shul, all capitals of Tibetan prefectures. There are also several restaurants in Beijing with *nang ma* bar-style song and dance displays. *Nang ma* bars are less common in county towns, many of which have only discos or karaoke bars, though several I visited apparently had *nang ma* bars that had closed ('Ba' thang, Dkar mdzes, Li thang). Gser shul in Dkar mdzes Prefecture still had a *nang ma* bar, and one had just opened in Rma chu when I visited in 2006. At least several of the county towns in Lha sa municipality also have *nang ma* bars, plus at least one in Lho kha.

³⁷ Of the pre-1959 genres of Tibetan non-monastic music and dance, it appears that only *gar* was performed solely by professional performers (in the sense of salaried or specially trained experts). Three other genres were performed by either amateurs or groups that contained both amateur and full-time practitioners: *nang ma* and *stod gzhaz* (within the Nang ma'i skyid sdug), the *a ce lha mo* opera (within the Skyor mo lung troupe), and *ral pa*. The vast majority of Tibetan performing arts were performed by amateurs. Most group dances are traditionally performed by members of the community, particularly those who are good dancers and singers, but certainly not by paid professionals, and it is similar for nomad songs. I am grateful to Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy for her clarification on the above points (personal communication, September 2006).

³⁸ While a good state salary may be about ¥2000 in Lha sa and ¥3000 a very good salary, the most popular singers in Lha sa's big *nang ma* bars were earning over ¥5000 a month in 2004–2005, though wages seemed to have dropped for most singers in 2006 with the influx of many singers from A mdo happy to perform for ¥1500 (an excellent salary for a rural migrant to Lha sa, as many of the singers are). Singers also gain exposure that can help launch careers as independent artists. Dancers are paid less, but can earn ¥1500 a month; a choreographer/coach earns significantly more. Lha sa *nang ma* bars pay by far the highest salaries (partly due to the state sponsored economic boom in the Tibet Autonomous Region), closely followed by Chengdu, and hence attract the best and most ambitious singers. Singers in a smaller *nang ma* bar in Gannan, for example, were apparently only making 300 to ¥500 per month, which is a low to medium salary for that region. Representatives of one county in Dkar mdzes Prefecture admitted that one of their troupes had closed down because so many performers had left to perform in *nang ma* bars in Lha sa due to the high salaries.

³⁹ The Zlos gar tshogs pa and the Glu gar tshogs pa. Both perform song and dance: the former, modern styles; and the latter, distinct traditional genres (though largely in modernized forms).

and ten male dancers,⁴⁰ many of whom are from the dance troupe in A mdo snga pa Prefecture, Sichuan Province, which is G.yung drung rgyal's native area.

The first *nang ma* bars in Lha sa were talked about outside Tibet as bastions of traditional culture resisting the domination of Chinese-style karaoke bars and discos. However, *nang ma* bars now contain, at a guess, a maximum of 5-10 percent traditional Tibetan music (and much of that in modified form), and probably 80 percent Chinese language songs in all except the smallest *nang ma* bars. In general, Chinese is used to introduce acts, even in small *nang ma* bars in county towns. The dance style of *nang ma* bars now represents a wholesale adoption of dance troupe style, with most *nang ma* bars, especially the bigger ones, having a dance coach/choreographer who is either a graduate or current member of a dance troupe or conservatoire. Thus, the junior performers at *nang ma* bars – even those who are not former dance troupe members or conservatoire graduates – learn the state dance style. Dance troupe dances are also performed in *nang ma* bars, being copied from dance troupe performances (easily available on VCDs or television), taught by a dance troupe member who is paid to teach a particular dance (another source of extra income for dance troupe professionals), or choreographed anew but with the same basic repertoire of steps and the same state-style staged, costumed, and balletic aesthetic. This has resulted in *nang ma* bars becoming the equivalent of private dance troupes. G.yung drung rgyal's *nang ma* bar in Lha sa, in particular, with its flawless dance performances (dancers are fined ¥10 for mistakes), is of the standard to be expected from a prefecture level group, certainly more trained and professional than county troupes, and is setting new standards for *nang ma* bar performance. The fact that dancers from the *nang ma* bars of Lha sa as well as all the official troupes had to perform in Lha sa for the show I saw on National Day, October 1, 2004, further shows the equivalence of *nang ma* bar and state dance troupe dancing and dancers. The linking of *nang ma* bars to the state style and the state institutions also results in a large degree of standardization in terms of repertoire, dance steps, and dance style in *nang ma* bars as far afield as Lha sa, Gannan, Chengdu and Xining.

While the song and vocal styles of *nang ma* bars, not discussed in detail here, as much reflect popular culture being appropriated by the domain of official culture as vice versa,⁴¹ the typical performance style of the songs is identical to that of the dance troupes. On the whole, singers sing and do not dance, and perform statically with hand gesturing, something that has come to be incorporated in performances of songs as diverse as Chinese/Tibetan/Western rock and pop, bel canto opera, nomad songs, and even modernized versions of regional dance-songs. A series of photographs from a singing competition held in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in A mdo illustrates this.

⁴⁰ Previously the biggest *nang ma* bar troupes consisted of about five female and five male dancers.

⁴¹ The far greater level of conformity to the state style in dance and presentation as opposed to song and singing or vocal style is discussed below.



Figure 5a: *Bel canto style in Gannan competition, August 2005.*

Most singers also follow the norm of walking to the back of the stage with their back facing the audience during instrumental interludes and then turning to the audience again when they sing again. A new trend in Tibetan-style dance songs is to dance a few very basic steps strictly during the interludes in Tibetan songs based on or made for dancing, still leaving the “taboo” on dancing and singing together unbroken. However, static performances of even dance songs with dance-based lyrics are found. Globalized patterns that have entered Tibet seem set to change this performance style, but in 2005, this blueprint still remained very much the default and the norm.



Figure 5b: *Nomad song in Gannan competition, August 2005.*

The state style also entered the recorded popular culture scene around the late 1990s in close conjunction with *nang ma* bars, as Tibetan music started to be released visually on VCD. The first Tibetan VCD was made in 1996/1997 by the government of Dkar mdzes Prefecture. The next was released in 1998 by Thang go la, one of the most famous *nang ma* bars in Chengdu, which quickly went into music production and has become one of the leading establishments of Tibetan popular music culture and the Tibetan music industry, launching many famous Tibetan pop artists such as Chung zhol sgröl ma and Bkra shis nyi ma.⁴² There has been much state-style/*nang ma* bar-style dancing in Tibetan pop VCDs since this

⁴² Interview with Tshe dbang, owner of Thang go la, Chengdu, June 8, 2005.

time, with Thang go la's immensely popular "disco" medleys filmed in Thang go la with backing dancing from the Thang go la dancers, and a variety of other productions using dance troupe performers, again achieving polished and modern performance.



Figure 5c: Chinese nationalist song in Gannan competition.

In a dance competition between amateur troupes in 'Dam gzhung Horserace Festival 2004, key aspects of the state style were adopted through aspiration to professionalism, good performance, and impressiveness in a parallel process to that of the transformation of the *nang ma* bars in urban Tibet. Eight troupes representing townships of 'Dam gzhung County,⁴³ part of the high and very poor nomadic plains known as the Byang thang north of Lha sa, performed circle dance (*sgor gzhaz*),⁴⁴ traditionally a group, participative dance accompanied only by the singing of the dancers. The eight township groups that competed varied greatly in their remoteness, one very close to Lha sa and touristic (Yang pa chen), another half an hour's drive on the new good road from Lha sa (Gung thang), and at least one very remote, without electricity in the villages and a long way from good roads (Rgyal mtha'). The troupes were all amateur, made up of nomads, and generally had started practicing for the competition just a couple of months in advance. The competition rules were for each group to present three "new" circle dances, and the group that performed and also looked the best would win, as judged by leaders of the townships who vote for all the groups but their own. "New" was not defined in detail, but at the least would involve a new melody, new lyrics, or new choreography, albeit in existing/traditional style with existing dance steps. However, most troupes presented many modifications of the local style in the line of the state style (also by this time *nang ma* bar style) in bids to impress and be modern.

While many troupes presented one or more of their dances close to traditional style, singing as they danced but with newly composed lyrics and/or tunes and configurations of steps, all of them enhanced the style with an aesthetic of virtuosity and show, a core part of the state style and its concept of "art" as opposed to the

⁴³ The township (*xiang*) is the smallest administrative unit in China, consisting of several villages; next is the county (*rdzong, xian*), consisting of several townships; then similarly the prefecture, then the province, and then the nation.

⁴⁴ *Sgor gzhaz* is known in east and northeast Tibet as *sgor bro*.

“raw material” of “folk” music/dance. This involved higher hands and faster, more virtuosic performances, with women jumping as well as the men, and accelerating foot stamping which drew cheers from the crowd. There was also a move to complexity and variety in performance, with sections of dance juxtaposed with nomad songs (not traditionally a part of circle dance) performed by several groups. In one case there was a narrative drama setting for the dance, and in another, a solo cameo performance. However, none of the performers had been trained in conservatoires, and there was no attempt to modify voices to bel canto or Chinese style, which is difficult anyway to do without training. Similarly, despite high hand moves, the really characteristic stretched ballet posture of the state style was also absent, and there were no balletic moves but rather the heavy foot stamping characteristic of nomad dance.⁴⁵ The troupes wore matching clothes, but in the sense of their best local clothes rather than special costumes, and brightly colored floaty costumes were absent, apart from a little girl who danced solo in a very kitsch outfit.⁴⁶



Figure 6: Entry of dancers in Damshung horse race 2004, dance competition.

The balletic postures, moves, brightly colored floaty costumes, and modified vocal style can be seen making their presence felt strongly in amateur and semi-professional county dance troupes,⁴⁷ and are the norm by prefecture level.

In addition to the above adaptations of traditional parameters, a more fundamental change was the separation of dance and song. Some troupes pre-recorded their own singing of the dance song and played this as they danced instead of singing themselves. In a bigger festival I went to (Nag chu Prefecture, with performances by county troupes), two troupes who pre-recorded their own singing cited concerns for audibility. At 'Dam gzhung, however, this does not seem to have been a factor since groups sang live (which was very audible – the

⁴⁵ This style of nomad dance characterized by heavy foot stamping seems to have been introduced to communities of A mdo nomads in Gannan in the 1960s through Chinese-led propaganda troupes, though whether it was an “invented tradition” (Eric J. Hobsbawn and Terence O. Ranger, ed, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) of that era or was imported to A mdo from the Byang thang is not clear at present.

⁴⁶ The hats in the picture, along with cowboy hats, are widespread in Tibet and are now effectively local style, revealing the problems of searching for the “traditional” in Tibet.

⁴⁷ I witnessed this at Nag chu Horseshoe Festival in 2004, with the performances of county troupes.

performance space was not very large and the groups were big) and also used pre-recorded singing. All four groups I talked to, out of eight that performed at 'Dam gzhung, said they were used to singing and dancing together and felt more comfortable doing so. The reasons for pre-recording seem to have been more to do with wanting to focus on both singing and dancing separately to make sure that both were good – the same division of labor logic of the state style, although the state dance troupes do not pre-record the singing of the dancers.

Several troupes danced to pre-recorded commercial songs as opposed to their own singing, exactly mirroring the state style. These groups appealed explicitly to modernity in their choice to do so, stating in two cases that despite being comfortable singing and dancing local songs together, they wanted to “keep up with the new society.” One troupe, which I did not talk to, danced to a disco-style song with disco-style steps, an obvious bid for modernity. Another danced to a pre-recorded semi-traditional 'ba' gzhaz, a famous genre of Khams pa circle dance from about one-thousand kilometers to the southeast of 'Dam gzhung, copying exactly the steps on the VCD. They said that in addition to wanting to “keep up with the new society,” they could not sing themselves because they did not know the dialect of this song – a key reason for the separation of dance and song in an increasingly widespread new practice of amateur/public/participative circle dance in nang ma bars and town squares, described below.

One troupe, particularly keen to win the competition, had hired a new teacher who had been trained in Lha sa's Art School (*rgyu rtsal slob grwa*), hence drawing explicitly on the professionalism of the state style as a way of enhancing and improving their performance to put them a cut above the rest. This troupe's last dance was something of a *tour de force*, a lengthy tripartite performance that involved simultaneous singing and dancing, dancing to a pop song, and dancing to their voices pre-recorded, a kind of performance diagram of processes and interpretations of modernity. The part with the pop song (a pop 'ba' gzhaz) involved a little girl performing solo dressed in spangled, brightly colored clothes complete with colorfully spotted tights, dancing non-local moves – a clear and somewhat gimmicky bid for “modernity.” This was the dance they were most proud of, and they had high hopes of winning.

The separation of song and dance, which I directly questioned the groups about, was also interpreted in terms of modernity by two troupes that did not adopt it – whether in the case of recording their own singing or dancing to songs from commercial VCDs – stating that although they did not want to perform in this way, they could see that it “fits well with the new society.” These two groups adopted a firmly traditionalist stance. One was the group from the most remote township without electricity in villages (Rgyal mtha'), which stated that they liked the traditional ways and wanted to preserve them – that they didn't mind if they won or not, but wanted to preserve traditions. The other traditionalist group was Dbyangs pa can, close to Lha sa, and the most economically developed and cosmopolitan of the townships with famous hot springs which draw many tourists. They stated that they were proud of their traditions, were comfortable with singing and dancing

together, and thought they got more in the spirit of the performance and gave a better show overall, although it was harder work. One member, appealing to facts of tradition in a slightly exasperated way, stated that “circle dance means dancing and singing together.” Yangs pa chen presented one of their dances in a dramatic setting, seeing this as a way of being original within a traditional framework, which they interpreted as involving singing and dancing together and not using commercial songs. It was interesting to note that Yangs pa chen was the only troupe who had had their traditional dances valorized by outsiders (a Chinese film crew), which had perhaps given them a vote of confidence from the modern world to have pride in their traditions and hence to embark confidently on being traditional.

Economic Development, Being “Modern,” and Cultural “Distinction”

This ascent, by the late 1990s, of the state style to the position of virtually undisputed norm of Tibetan popular culture in dance, costume, and performance style is surprising, and significantly different from the more radical musical culture of the 1980s and early 1990s. As the cases of *nang ma* bars and the dance competition at 'Dam gzhung Horserace Festival both show, there is now an enthusiastic appropriation by the public of the state style reaching (albeit unevenly) right down to a grassroots level. However, the state style, even when adopted *in toto* in the case of *nang ma* bar dance via state-trained artists, is not, as far as I have observed, seen generally by Tibetans as being the *state* style or sinicization, but rather is seen as a modern, slick, urban, professional performance that is eminently desirable.

As mentioned above, a major factor in this has been the softening of the state's image with its appropriation of new music fashions and less emphasis on overtly political performances. However, this does not explain the impetus from the public itself to see the state style as desirable modernity, leading to its appropriation by the people rather than imposition on them. The reason for this crucial development can be seen to emanate from a fundamental change in the socio-economic conditions of Tibet.

From the mid-1990s to some extent, but most clearly from the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been a dramatic increase in wealth in the “backward” western provinces including all those containing Tibetan areas: the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan. This has been caused by economic development strategies, most crucially the Western Development Drive launched in 1999, which saw massive state investment resulting in a (state subsidized) economic boom, with spectacular GDP growth in all the Tibetan areas. In its wake, a new kind of middle class of wealthy Tibetans and Chinese immigrants has grown up in Tibetan urban areas. The economic boom has reached little into the rural areas and hence a marked urban-rural divide has

emerged, with rural Tibetans in particular marginalized in terms of wealth, education, and healthcare.⁴⁸

With this economic development reaching Tibet, albeit extremely unevenly, there is an entirely new phenomenon of social *opportunity*, *mobility*, and *aspiration*: a widespread sense of wanting to get rich and do well and its theoretical possibility. Because the society of “old” Tibet was hierarchical, there was limited social mobility. During the revolutionary period, however, these social stratifications were eliminated and everyone became, in effect, a joint underclass, except those few able to move to positions of some privilege through politics. Now, in addition to the political structure, there is a (subsidized) capitalist hierarchical social order in Tibet with unprecedented scope for social mobility through competition: a nomad or farmer *can* rise to as much or more wealth as someone from a “good” urban family or a party member if they are successful in business, although the odds are in most cases stacked against them in terms of education and finance. With the concentration of state-sponsored economic development in the big cities, such rural Tibetans are increasingly migrating to cities in search of work. However, although in theory there is the *prospect* of work and money, in practice most rural Tibetans are singularly unequipped to find work in the cities in terms of the way they look and dress, as well as in their lack of knowledge of good spoken and written Chinese. Many in fact only know their local dialect of Tibetan, and thus are initially unable to communicate with Tibetans and deal with even ordinary tasks (buying things, finding a bus, and so forth). Rural Tibetans arrive in cities generally after having traveled long distances, wear dirty, torn clothes, and simply look like “fish out of water,” and urban Tibetans, urbanized rural Tibetans, and Chinese immigrants all look down on them. Although there are strong support networks of Tibetans from the same native area (*pha yul*) and of course relatives, I have witnessed many cases of people who, whilst generously and energetically helping and supporting new arrivals, want at the same time to keep a certain distance from them.

⁴⁸ Tibet Information Network, “Despite Economic Boom, Rural Standards of Living in the Tibet Autonomous Region Still Below 1992 Levels” (originally published on Tibet Information Network, “News Update,” February 6, 2003; site now discontinued, article currently unavailable); Tibet Information Network, “Deciphering Economic Growth in the Tibet Autonomous Region.” <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=455&t=1&c=4> (originally published on Tibet Information Network, “Special Report,” April 8, 2003; site now discontinued); Tibet Information Network, “The Rich Get Richer, and the Poor? Rural Poverty and Inequality in Tibet – Indications from Recent Official Surveys,” (originally published on Tibet Information Network, “News Update,” May 31, 2003; site now discontinued, article currently unavailable); Tibet Information Network, “Unequal Competitors: Despite Improvements in Education Levels, Skills of Tibetan Workforce Still Far Short of Immigrants” (originally published on Tibet Information Network, “News Update,” February 23, 2004; site now discontinued, article currently unavailable); Tibet Information Network, “Tibetans Lose Ground in Public Sector Employment,” <http://www.phayul.com/news/tools/print.aspx?id=8864&t=0> (originally published on Tibet Information Network, “News Update,” January 20, 2005; site now discontinued); Tibet Information Network, “High TAR Wages Benefit the Privileged,” <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=9033&t=1&c=1> (originally published on Tibet Information Network, “News Update,” February 10, 2005; site now discontinued); Fischer, *State Growth and Social Exclusion*.

While the state modernity of the 1950s promised development, improvement, and “civilization” by “raising cultural standards,”⁴⁹ it remained in the realm of abstract ideology, as by the end of the Cultural Revolution, society had fallen into chaos and the overwhelming majority of people into poverty. In today’s society, however, virtually all Tibetans can see that wealth is there to be had, although only a small minority actually get rich. In this context, one can see the concrete appeal and relevance of a performance style which embodies and has long propagated an ideology of development (of being a superior style, a style of higher standards and aesthetics, a style of “proper” training, and so on), since there are now socio-economic realities that can be conflated with this ideology. In other words, this style, with its developmentalist ideology, forms a ready-made package for processes of “distinction,” of expressing, demarcating, and creating social hierarchy through culture.⁵⁰ The state style therefore embodies, fuels, and helps create the new dominant modernity of *urban rather than rural, educated rather than illiterate, professional/good/proper dance rather than unprofessional/sloppy dance, and Chinese at least in addition to if not rather than Tibetan language – a sense of modernity as pitted against “backwardness,” which emerges as rural/village/illiterate/sloppy/traditional/Tibetan*. Economic necessity or competitive social aspiration means that once out of the village, people tend to want to become modern in this sense, and now this is true even within the village, due to recent rural penetration by the mass media, which itself is a result of the economic boom. A few anecdotes illuminate this process of “distinction”:

1. I questioned a singer from a rural area of Khams in a *nang ma* bar in Lha sa as to why he did not sing while he danced, the norm of traditional Tibetan dances. He at first appealed to ideas of professionalism and “proper” performance, saying that in the village they often make mistakes in their singing or do not sing that well, and while it does not matter in the village, it is not OK to do that in a *nang ma* bar when you are being paid to perform. Hence, he concentrates on singing while he sings and does not dance, though he does dance a little in interludes. He further added that he did not want to look like a farmer when he performed, singing and dancing songs together like they did in the village.
2. A very successful *nang ma* bar singer (who had trained and worked in official institutions) had two friends from her village who were in Lha sa, impoverished and desperate for work. Both have superb voices and are excellent singers of unaccompanied nomad songs and in the male singer’s case, *rdung len*. She wanted to help them and put a lot of energy into coaching them, giving them advice on fashion and image as well as the pop style and repertoire, all of which needed a lot of work. Their poor – or in the female singer’s case, total lack of – Chinese language skills were

⁴⁹ McDougall, *Mao’s “Talk at the Yan’an Conference,”* 68-69

⁵⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1986).

also a problem, since bad Chinese pronunciation immediately marks you as “rural” and “backward” in a city. They therefore stuck to Tibetan songs rather than singing in bad Chinese, although singing in Chinese is virtually essential in *nang ma* bars in Lha sa. Along with a lack of familiarity with the pop genres, knowing how to present on stage was one of the biggest problems. The experienced singer remarked, exasperated, after the male singer had a disappointing unsuccessful audition, that “he just looked like a total nomad when he sang.” She clearly meant “nomad” in the sense of rural/backward/unpolished, referring to his lack of ability to “present” the song on stage in the standard dance troupe/*nang ma* bar style with hand gestures and so forth. I later watched the female singer give what must have been a similar audition in a *nang ma* bar in Chengdu, looking awkward, nervous, and rather lost (not knowing what to do with her hands, and so forth). The male singer has gained sufficient stage savvy through practice in bottom-end *nang ma* bars and can sing well enough in Chinese at least for smaller *nang ma* bars. The girl was taken under the wing of a supportive small *nang ma* bar in Chengdu who recognized her potential in terms of voice and good looks and trained her. She has since gone to Beijing, where she is singing in a restaurant with good prospects. This process of adapting to modernity and shaking off their rural identity – which my friend emphasized again and again she herself had to go through, but without the support – took around a year and a half.

3. In an A mdo village I visited, there was a sharp distinction between the way groups of nomads who have been to school in the prefecture town dance and the way those who have stayed in the village, largely illiterate, dance. The former dance to pre-recorded songs or music, without singing themselves, in dance troupe style (though without highly balletic moves or posture) and in the dance troupe style “costumes”; the village nomads dance in “traditional” style,⁵¹ singing as they dance with no accompaniment, wearing best local clothes and ornaments. This dancing took place in a show for Tibetan New Year, which was staged and had people introducing the acts just like a *nang ma* bar or TV show; people boasted that no other village in their valley could put on such a show as theirs, and that their village was famous “far and wide.”
4. Echoing the sense of the singer from Khams who wanted to concentrate on singing in the professional context of the *nang ma* bar rather than not singing “properly” as in the village, a Tibetan I met told me how, although he was seen as the best dancer of his village, when he went to work in a *nang ma* bar in a tourist campsite with a coach trained in a Chinese conservatoire, he was told he danced badly. His moves were too sloppy

⁵¹ This “traditional” style of nomad dance in this part of A mdo was in fact introduced by Chinese-led propaganda troupes in the 1960s. Prior to this, people reported that there was in fact no dance in this area; there were dances in neighboring Bla brang but the *sgor bro* type dances dated only from the arrival of the Fifth ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa in 1920 from Li thang (the *gar* dances seem to be older; Morcom, “History, Traditions, Identities, and Nationalism).” See note 13.

and relaxed (the traditional Tibetan dance body language seen in derogatory terms). He demonstrated how he was taught to dance “properly” by this coach in a more sharp and exact way, meeting clearer lines with his arm and leg movements, and more vertical and horizontal lines with his arms (the “scientific,” ballet-influenced conservatoire style of dance).

5. A very talented singer of A mdo *rdung len* insisted she will not make a *rdung len* album or sing with an also talented singer friend who sings *rdung len*, but will persist in making a pop album (which she also sings extremely well). I expressed regret at the waste of her talent in *rdung len* singing and lack of loyalty for *rdung len* with all her energy going into pop, but we discussed how it would of course spoil her image as a pop singer, since the audience may not accept her if she had already established a rural and “backward” identity through singing *rdung len* and singing with a *rdung len* singer. Once successful in her pop career, we discussed, she could then sing whatever she wanted, and she said she would like to sing *rdung len*.

With dance, costumes, and performance style (but song and singing style to a lesser degree, as I explain below), these modernizing trends are very consistently mapped according to the hierarchies of officialdom, with a steady increase in elements of the state style as you move from village or township (as in 'Dam gzhung), to county, to prefecture (by which time you reach a total application of the style in dance), to province, to nation, from which the style emanates. The style is also mapped onto hierarchies of economy, smaller to larger/better established troupes, poorer to richer/more ambitious villages, and smaller/cheaper compared to larger/more expensive/flashier *nang ma* bars. There are exceptions, but the trend is very clear in all the places I visited, illustrating this overarching socio-economic and cultural hierarchy.

While “old” Tibet had social hierarchies, musical culture was divided more horizontally or geographically into loosely connected regional styles and genres.⁵² The arrival of the Chinese brought the first widespread vertical division of musical culture, essentially an imperialist one, which established the new Han-created pan-Tibetan style as developed in contrast to traditional genres as backward.⁵³ However, whilst the cultural division of the revolutionary period was essentially

⁵² Henrion-Dourcy notes that although both Beijing and Dharamsala present a divide between a popular culture and a literate culture in their representations of “old” Tibet, “while holding some truth, it is a caricatured depiction of the past.” She goes on to say,

As far as my experience in the Tibetan performing arts goes, this polarization appears more in discourse than in the more interwoven practice. Whether as sponsors, amateurs or even performers, high-ranking religious figures would indulge in, for example, *lha mo* or other songs and dances, with absolutely no second thought for partaking in this amusement (Henrion-Dourcy, “Women in the Performing Arts,” 198-99 n. 11).

⁵³ See Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, and Arjun Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination,” in “Globalization,” special issue, *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 1-20, for a critique of the concept of culture as “geographical traits” in the light of modernity. This point is discussed further below.

between Tibetan and Chinese, that of the liberalized and post-economic boom period is revealing more inter-Tibetan stratifications with the pan-Tibetan urban-rural divide. In particular, the wealthiest and most educated urban Tibetans (educated in China and more fluent in Chinese than Tibetan), and even well-educated middle-class urban Tibetans, in many ways have more in common socio-economically and aesthetically with Chinese elites than with rural Tibetans. In other words, this aspect of cultural change comes as much from inter-Tibetan dynamics as from Chinese domination over Tibetans, the predicament of the revolutionary period, and is far more powerful in its penetration of Tibetan society.

Ironically and paradoxically, large chunks of the state style and effectively its core developmentalist ideology are being cemented into social consciousness at a deep level through the class system resulting from free market reforms and capitalism as opposed to socialism, which sought to abolish those very hierarchies. The style and much of the ideology of the dance of the communist era seems to have found a genuine home in the capitalist era. This is, however, not so ironic when one recalls that the ideas of “science” and “progress” adopted in the reforms of late nineteenth/early twentieth-century China, and later seized on by the Chinese communists from the 1950s, are the same as those of bourgeois/elite Europe, and furthermore, the Chinese conservatoires were modeled on the ideology of intensive training and divided labor of the European conservatoires. This loop back to the bourgeois/elite European origins of both the ideology and much of the content of the state style also brings the state style in line with the now international consensus of slick, professional, staged/audience-oriented performance on MTV, mainstream pop albums, big concert halls, etc., the strongest institutional strand of which is the European tradition. This global hegemony is a further reason for the strong desirability of aspects of the state style and state trained professionals in the period since 2000, which has seen global culture enter Tibet.

There are two major forces that run counter to this form of modernity. One is globalization, discussed below. The other is the traditionalist tropes, seen in 'Dam gzhung, that break the association of traditional song and dance with backwardness: although traditional music and dance is unmodernized in the sense of the modernizations we have been talking about, this does not result in it being perceived as backward, but rather as something good and to take pride in. Traditionalism in Tibet always has the potential danger of being seen as latent separatism. Although it is not actually illegal or stamped out in principle, it is rarely supported by the government on a large level.

Such traditionalism can be seen at a grassroots level ('Dam gzhung), and also at higher levels. I once asked a top Tibetan composer why dance troupes never sing and dance simultaneously even though that is a constant of all Tibetan traditional dance. He replied surprisingly bluntly (he was drunk at the time), “That’s because of the Chinese,” and then added, “It’s going to change.” He also launched into a rapturous appreciation of Tibetan traditional music, and commented that he was not proud of much that he had done (i.e., all his modern style compositions).

What will happen in this space remains to be seen. In the dance competition in 'Dam gzhung, the group that tried so hard to be modern, finishing with the tripartite piece, did not even finish first or second. The winner was the most traditional troupe. The rules were for marks to be awarded by the jury of township leaders on the grounds of *quality* of performance, with no preference for style. Although it is not possible to tell if there was an element of marking *up* more traditional performances, the modern performances certainly failed to score on modernity alone. It will be interesting to see how future competitions fare. In 'Ba' thang, where there is strong support for the local dance 'ba' gzhaz, famous across Tibet and also relatively well-known in China, in the dance competitions (organized by the county authorities), more marks are given for traditional dances or traditional-style dances. However, this is the only example I have seen of dance in a form so far towards the traditional end of the modified-traditional continuum being preserved by the authorities. Other dances gain much support from local governments, such as Dkar mdzes *rdo bro* and Yul shul dance, but largely in modified forms.⁵⁴ The Lha sa and Gzhis ka rtse traditions of Tibetan lute songs and dances, including *nang ma* and *stod gzhaz*, were taught at Tibet University for some years after the end of the Cultural Revolution but are no longer taught. Western instruments such as piano and violin are taught currently. The *gar* repertoire of the Dalai Lama's court had an even shorter revival.⁵⁵

Assertions of traditionalism or Tibetan identity, though powerful, may also be applied very unevenly, relying as they do on symbols as much as facts of history. In 2005 there was a big festival in the A mdo area of Rma chu County (Gannan Prefecture, Gansu Province), where, as far as I know, for the first time in a Tibetan area, everyone had to sing in Tibetan, even some nationwide stars who virtually always sing in Chinese (for example G.yung drung rgyal). The rapidly increasing tendency of Tibetan singers to sing in Chinese, not Tibetan, is beginning to be noticed by people across Tibet as an undesirable trend of modernization, and assertions of Tibetan identity are beginning to be made to counter it. Another favorite symbol of ethnicity, a musical instrument, is also being seized upon in A mdo as an expression of Tibetan identity, with Rma chu dance troupe now only allowing people to play the Tibetan lute rather than the ubiquitous mandolin. This is soon to become a rule in the biggest A mdo-wide *rdung len* competition. However, the dance performance by Rma chu dance troupe that formed a backdrop to Tibetan language songs and some performances on the Tibetan lute at the festival in 2005 was all mainstream state style with bright, floaty costumes. There were

⁵⁴ Dkar mdzes *rdo bro* is performed in the county to a pre-recorded, big orchestral accompaniment. In the villages it is presumably performed without accompaniment and is much more like the *sgra snyan* dance traditions of Lha sa, which is what it has in fact been developed from (Morcom, "History, Traditions, Identities, and Nationalism"). Yul shul dance, having become significantly faster and more virtuosic, is now performed, even by many small, rural troupes, to the accompaniment of separate singers and musicians, rather than with the dancers singing themselves. In Yul shul Prefecture in northern Khams, Qinghai Province, a drive to speed and virtuosity in the famous local dance style has led to an established norm of the dancers not singing, but dancing to the accompaniment of separate singers and musicians.

⁵⁵ See *Unity and Discord*, 50-51.

also a number of singers performing in Chinese or even bel canto vocal styles, albeit in Tibetan language.

The Rma chu festival focus on language and instruments but not dance as an expression of Tibetanness also reveals another important trend in the modernizing of Tibetan musical culture: whilst the state style of dance is with few exceptions being adopted at all levels, singing is a more complex situation, representing much more localization and new styles that come *from* the people and regional traditions and are appropriated *by* the state rather than the other way round. A few troupes are now not sending singers for training in Chinese schools. Dancers of these troupes, however, are all sent to China for training. Rdo re of Rma chu dance troupe commented that with dance you can learn the conservatoire style and still be able to dance the traditional Tibetan way, but the vocal training is “one way,” or worse still, some singers are left unable to sing at all.⁵⁶ There is also pride in the vocal style of particularly the nomadic Tibetan areas where traditional voices are extremely powerful, capable of intricate ornamentation, and have very wide ranges. Though beyond the scope of this article, the processes of modernization in A mdo, which has countered the pan-Tibetan trend in many ways (though not in dance), is key to these assertions of Tibetan musical and language identity. However, although vocal and song style involves more traditionalist, Tibetan-identity driven motivation, the need to be able to present in the right way on stage is absolutely essential (as we saw with the two A mdo singers being groomed for *nang ma* bar performance) and the dance troupe style still leads here. This lack of traditionalist focus on dance except in a few cases probably represents the lack of attention given to dance in Tibetan musical culture as a whole: where good singers are admired, the ability to dance is very much taken for granted.⁵⁷

Mass Media, Migration, and Social Heterogeneity

The above discussion has focused on the adoption of the “state style” in popular and rural dance through the conflation of economic, social, and taste hierarchies in the public as well as the new cultural inclusiveness of the state, and facilitated by increased penetration of the mass media and the visual media from the late 1990s. I would like to turn now to another form of dance in Tibet to look at how aspects of the state style are being cemented by other features of modernity.

⁵⁶ The famous *a ce lha mo* singer A ma lha pa (1909-97) lost her voice permanently after being sent to Shanghai for vocal training (Henrion-Dourcy, “Women in the Performing Arts,” 213). I also met a talented singer who has lost a powerful and versatile voice after being taught how to sing “properly” in the “artistic” and bel canto style in a Chinese academy. In the performing arts world, most people know or know of such vocal casualties. The famous singer Bsod nams dbang mo, who shot to fame in a nationwide competition in 2002 singing a modern arrangement of a local nomad song but in a traditional nomad voice, has since joined the army song and dance troupe in Beijing, where her voice has become modified; I have heard people say – and say that “people say” – that her voice is now not as good as it was before.

⁵⁷ I am grateful to Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy for drawing my attention to this key point (personal communication, February 2005).

We have been looking at adaptations of circle dance by troupes in formal performances. Circle dance as it was before the 1950s is much more participative, performed by amateur members of the community for themselves; the whole sense of a chosen troupe competing, let alone performing on stage, however “traditional” or unmodernized their style, is a modern change, again echoing the dance troupe norm of professionalizing performance. However, a public, participative, non-audience-oriented but modern form of circle dance also exists and is a standard of *nang ma* bars, dating at least from 2000, when the VCD of “*a ba sgor bro*”⁵⁸ – still the most widely known and danced circle dance (*sgor bro*) of *nang ma* bars – was released.⁵⁹ It is also danced in town squares in Dkar mdzes prefecture (Khams), Chengdu (Shuanlu County, initiated by the Khams pa Tibetan population), Xining, and probably other areas too, first beginning, it seems, in Chengdu around 1998.



Figure 7a: *Sgor bro* in Shuanlu county square, Chengdu, August 2005.

Stylistically, this participative circle dance also follows the state model of dancing to pre-recorded commercial songs (often recorded by dance troupes) and not singing. Here, however, the separation of singing and dancing is certainly not related to concerns over professionalism/show/slick performance/virtuosity so important to the rural troupes discussed above, since hilariously bad dancing is quite acceptable! The ethos of this form of circle dance is in many ways opposed to the dances of the professional troupes. One of the promoters of public circle dance in Kangding (Dkar mdzes Prefecture), when I asked her if she looked to dance troupes for ideas, said that although she liked what they did, they were distant from the public in their professionalism, and she liked to promote the public, participative circle dance, which anyone could join in. Ideas of community-building and keeping old people in particular from “just sitting around playing mahjong” were all key ideas expressed by the people in Kangding and Chengdu who started the circle dance crazes there. These circle dances as danced in town squares are also a hybrid phenomenon of Tibetan dance with the Chinese practice of mass exercise, another state legacy. Many older people participate in public circle dance as a form of fun, socializing, and gentle exercise,

⁵⁸ *Bod dang chang rigs kyi sgor bro*, VCD ISRC CN-G12-00-012-00/V.J6, 2000.

⁵⁹ Other public dance in *nang ma* bars includes disco; waltzing to any song with the right kind of tempo (I saw people waltzing to a slow ballad by the trendy Lha sa rock band Gzi mig dgu pa as they performed in a bar in Lha sa in summer 2004); and step dancing routines, which work with 4-by-4 beat pop songs though not with Tibetan styles, as this would evoke *sgor gzhas* (Britney Spears’ “Hit Me Baby One More Time” worked well, for instance). While it is beyond the scope of this article, it can therefore be said that there are a number of forms of public, participative dance in music venues in Tibet.

though younger people also dance. There are also many Chinese people who dance in Kangding, Chengdu and Xining in particular.

The separation of singing and dancing in public circle dance can be seen most obviously as emerging as part of the package of dancing to pop songs à la dance troupes out of the hegemonic appeal of modernity and the will not to look backward in the urban contexts of town squares and *nang ma* bars. In the *nang ma* bars in particular, as stated above, the dance troupe model is now the unquestioned norm of dance performance, and anything else would be surprising. Even with the public circle dance in *nang ma* bars, at least some of the paid performers lead, ensuring a critical mass of dancers who know the steps and thus fusing the public circle dance to the staged circle dance performances.⁶⁰



Figure 7b: *Sgor bro* in Dar rise mdo square, Dkar mdzes Prefecture, May 2005.



Figure 7c: *Sgor bro* in Lithang county square, Dkar mdzes Prefecture, May 2005.

However, there is further reason for the lack of simultaneous singing and dancing in public circle dance that relates to a key aspect of modernity other than the musical stylistic and aesthetic modernity set by the state. As Appadurai describes, the correlation of place, ethnicity, language, and culture is being weakened in global modernity. With increased movement of people across and within national and other borders, heterogeneous communities are increasingly common, as are

⁶⁰ The county dance troupe also leads the public *sgor gzhas* in Li thang, and members have to dance. The public *sgor gzhas* in Kangding and Chengdu, however, are not related to official dance troupes.

diasporas and refugees.⁶¹ Chinese immigration into Tibet increased following the lifting of restrictions on immigration in 1994,⁶² and it further intensified beginning in 1999 with the Western Development Drive, accompanied by large numbers of rural Tibetans migrating from different regions to Tibetan cities. Thus with public, urban circle dance, the entire group is usually unable to sing along since the songs are not in everyone's dialect or native singing style. This delinking of people, place, and style is made stronger by the mass media, where, as we saw in the case of the 'ba' gzhals danced in 'Dam gzhung, people have access to music and dance (through the audio-visual VCD) from far away regions.

This delinking, reconfiguration and hybridization of people, place, identity, style and language is a feature of modernity and globalization in general. However, it is even more sharply a fact of Tibetan modernity due to the rapid influx to Tibetan areas of Chinese immigrants who neither know nor subsequently learn Tibetan, arriving to make money from the economic boom which has, along with the poor level of education in Tibet, resulted in a greater demand for skilled labor than local supply can fill.⁶³ Speaking Chinese is now an economic and practical necessity in Tibetan cities, while speaking Tibetan is not. Furthermore, the vast majority of Chinese migrants to Tibetan areas do not pick up the local language due to still prevalent cultural attitudes toward minorities as inferior/backward and so forth, compounded by zero pressure from the government for Chinese migrants in Tibetan areas to learn the indigenous language.⁶⁴ Therefore, Chinese participants in circle dance (and there are many, especially in town squares) cannot sing along.



Figure 7d: Sgor bro in nang ma bar in Gannan prefecture town, June 2005.

The continuing de-emphasis of Tibetan language in education in Tibetan areas, where Tibetan is generally a subject taught in a Chinese-medium school, has also resulted in the phenomenon of many well-educated Tibetans being more comfortable

⁶¹ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 1-23. Ramnarine critiques the trope of a geographically or ethnically bounded concept of "culture" in her article on music and "diasporic imagination" in Trinidad (Tina Ramnarine, "Music in the Diasporic Imagination and the Performance of Cultural (Dis)placement in Trinidad," in *Island Musics*, ed. Kevin Dawe (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), 166-67).

⁶² See Tibet Information Network, trans., "Third Work Forum on Tibet," 1994, translated excerpts available on <http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/china/china10.html>.

⁶³ Chinese immigration into Tibet is also desired by the government for reasons of stability. I was told by a businessman setting up a factory in Lha sa that he thought he could get away with hiring 80 percent Tibetans. I asked if it would be okay to hire 100 percent and he said no. I asked if it would be okay to hire 100 percent Chinese and he said "absolutely no problem."

⁶⁴ In contrast, Indians and Nepalese living in or working in Tibetan exile communities speak at least some Tibetan.

with Chinese.⁶⁵ The lack of knowledge of written Tibetan in particular makes it far more difficult for Tibetans to pick up other Tibetan dialects, since it is the written language which is the most important common link between the different dialects. Hence, it becomes easier to use Chinese, even amongst Tibetans who do not like doing so because of concerns for Tibetan language and identity.⁶⁶

Another parallel factor to dialect and language problems that compounds the inability of groups to sing to public circle dance is the fact that the circle dance craze is very much a Tibetan phenomenon, and the songs that are thought appropriate for dancing circle dance are virtually always Tibetan songs – generally songs with a strong ethnic flavor which is brought about through closeness to regional singing styles. The songs are grounded in particular regional vocal styles which Tibetans from other areas tend not to identify with, and are often rural styles which urban Tibetans tend not to identify with in terms of actually singing. In some cases, such as with Nag chu circle dance and pop *rdung len* (also danced as circle dance), it is virtually impossible to sing along with the distinct vocal style of the songs unless one has grown up as a nomad. One sometimes sees people in *nang ma* bars singing along to certain songs from their native area (Nag chu or Khams pa 'ba' *gzhaz*, for example), or to some particularly famous songs.

There is certainly a sense of loss or breakdown of Tibetan community in the voiceless dancing of public circle dance.⁶⁷ However, public circle dance is also a strong show of Tibetan-ness, and a display of the variety and richness of Tibet's regional dance songs, despite centralizing/homogenizing tendencies such as a significant degree of standardization of dance steps in dances from different regions. In Kangding, one of the organizers of the public circle dance explained that they seek to collect a variety of dances from different areas of Dkar mdzes Prefecture (of which Kangding is the capital), learning dances from people from that region. She also said they were planning to send people to certain villages to learn particular dances. Dances are also learned from VCDs of dance troupe performances, and pop circle dance has become popular as a result of, and in turn catering to, the craze in town squares and *nang ma* bars.

The dance moves of public circle dance are also very Tibetan, though with extensive mixing and matching of moves from different regions and newly-created Tibetan-style moves. There are generally no balletic movements, the posture is the

⁶⁵ There is also a strong tendency of educated Tibetans to speak in Chinese to show off their education and status, in a parallel situation to the heavy use of English, the language of the (former) rulers, in contemporary India. Tibetan language use amongst intellectuals in A mdo is far stronger than in central Tibet and Khams due to more focus on Tibetan language in schools there.

⁶⁶ Pronunciation in different dialects varies drastically, but it is consistent with spelling, so if the spelling of a word is known, so is the phonetic transformations of it in different dialects. Literary Tibetan also contains much of the localized vocabulary of different dialects. The difference between Lha sa and a Khams pa or an A mdo dialect is roughly equivalent to perhaps French and Italian or Spanish, or Hindi and Gujarati or Punjabi, initially largely mutually unintelligible and normally taking a few months to acquire basic communication skills.

⁶⁷ Singing while dancing is the norm of both the professionals and the public in *sgor gzhaz* in exile, which represents a much more homogenous and homogenized central-Tibetan community.

relaxed stance of traditional Tibetan dance, and the body language of the moves is very Tibetan, apart from Chinese participants who are always easy to spot.⁶⁸ Some of the professional dancers in *nang ma* bars can also be seen to code-switch into a more relaxed dance posture for dancing circle dance than their formally performed dances. There are other developments too, such as dancing the Tibetan steps with more of a disco feel; subdividing the pop beats of the Tibetan songs in ways that do not exist in traditional Tibetan dance; and a certain amount of humor and fun, such as that arising from “funny dancing,” in which untrained and (in the case of *nang ma* bars) often drunk individuals dance, or, as I have seen on a few occasions, dancing circle dance to non-circle dance pop songs (in any language).

Global Modernities and a New Order of the Struggle for Hegemony

We have seen a widespread acceptance of many aspects of the state style due to the new cultural inclusiveness of the state, and also upward mobility and social aspiration in the realm of the public. This process has involved a struggle for hegemony between people and state. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, however, a steady flow of global musical and dance modernities has reached Tibet via the global media and migration of people, and a hegemonic struggle of a new order has therefore begun with forces above the state (in geo-political and economic terms) and also more lateral to it (such as India and Nepal). The state, ever aware of the social and political implications of style and identity in music, continues to accept/appropriate globalized forms into dance troupe performance and TV variety shows. However, there are some interesting reconfigurations of song and dance emerging that do suggest change of a new order again, and new possibilities for the ways modernity is conceived.



Figure 8a: PVC trousers and Tibetan shirt in *nang ma* bar, Lhasa.



Figure 8b: Gold PVC suit, compere in *nang ma* bar, Nag chu, August 2004.

⁶⁸ The only place I have seen a very un-Tibetan feel to *sgor gzas* in terms of songs and dance was in Chengdu (Shuanlu County), where a very large dancing group had been started by a party-loving Tibetan-Chinese woman with overwhelmingly Chinese participants, and many Chinese language propaganda songs were played. The dance was far more hybrid, involving very dance-troupe style balletic moves and many “uplifting” moves. There were, however, more typically Tibetan groups in smaller squares nearby.

One trend, seen across much of the “developing” world, is the resurgence of ethnic sounds, though in a form combined with global sounds, thereby overcoming associations of backwardness. There are also moves toward the recoupling of Tibetan song and dance, the separation of which is one of the most ingrained legacies of the state style. Dbyangs can lha mo⁶⁹ shot to fame around 2003 with her pop ‘*ba’ gzhaz*’ albums, on which she sings *and* dances accompanied by a troupe of dancers who do not sing but dance with abandon in a Tibetan landscape. The dancers perform largely in a circle, and she sometimes performs with them and sometimes in the center (more the soloistic star); shots of Dbyangs can lha mo in various Tibetan scenes (monasteries, Tibetan homes, with sheep, yak, and so forth) are also intercut with the hillside scene. In the wake of these massively successful albums, themselves almost certainly building on the earlier circle dance craze of a *ba sgor bro*-type circle dance, more similar albums have been released from other areas of Tibet. The public circle dance craze, in a sense a craze for Tibetan ethnic songs, is also a feature of this globalization of Tibetan sounds, and these public circle dance or similar songs may also be performed solo in *nang ma* bars and festivals by singers who dance a bit in the interludes, as explained above. A new look also seems to be emerging on the lines of this new sound, less Chinese kitsch and more a fusion of Tibetan with western, with a heavier look of Tibetan traditional textiles and deeper colors mixed also with fabrics like PVC.

Many of the newest pop stars owe as much to Afro-American performance style as to dance troupe style, and with this, there is increased importance on dance in performance and another kind of recoupling of song and dance. There are the highly choreographed girl bands and now boy bands, the girl bands in particular involving some Tibetan style moves. These bands tend to adopt a highly ethnic but globally hip and sexy image (for example, off-the-shoulder Tibetan dresses), but there is still a lot of kitsch.



Figure 9a: Girl band in nang ma bar, Lhasa, October 2005.



Figure 9b: Girl band perform in festival in Dar tse mdo, May 2005.

There are also solo artists who dance in a more western pop/soul/rap style as a part of singing performance, such as Chung zhol sgröl ma, who launched a female soul style of singing in Tibet. These global dance (and vocal) styles also undermine

⁶⁹ Not to be confused with Real World’s Dbyangs can lha mo, who is from the exile community (though born in Tibet).

the light and stretched balletic posture and aesthetic of the dance troupes, since they adopt a relaxed posture in fact more in line with that of traditional Tibetan dance. For one of the really top-end *nang ma* bars, there is now an expectation of something more than the conventional static performance style (which, indeed, is becoming sidelined in some dance troupes too, and especially on Chinese television where performers move and dance a lot now). One of the performers who integrated song and dance most and never failed to get the most enthusiastic reception in *nang ma* bars was a Tibetan girl who performed Britney Spears and Tibetan and Chinese pop full of moves learned from Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez videos (which are widely available on VCD).

So while it may be perceived as backward for a singer to dance and sing together “like a farmer” in a bar in Lha sa, when there is the polished, global hip of some of these styles, there is absolutely no question of backwardness whatsoever, but rather a new sense of ethnic identity and another level to the hierarchy of taste. But to keep the new upsurge of indigenous sounds in context it must be emphasized again: while ethnic is trendy, traditional is not. Rural Tibetans, however good their voices are and however good-looking they are, will not get work in a *nang ma* bar unless they can adapt to the modern, urban, staged, slick performance style, whether dance troupe or global. In an echo back to Mao, such performers can at best be seen as “raw material,” to be trained, changed, “developed,” and made acceptable for the new modernity of twenty-first century Tibet.

Glossary

Note: glossary entries are organized in Tibetan alphabetical order. All entries list the following information in this order: THDL Extended Wylie transliteration of the term, THDL Phonetic rendering of the term, English translation, equivalents in other languages, dates when applicable, and type.

Ka					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>kong po</i>	Kongpo				Place
<i>dkar mdzes</i>	Kandzé				Place
<i>dkar mdzes rdo bro</i>	Kandzé dodro				Term
<i>bkra shis nyi ma</i>	Trashi Nyima				Person
<i>bkra shis tshe ring</i>	Trashi Tsering				Person
<i>skyor mo lung</i>	Kyormolung				Organization
Kha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>khams</i>	Kham				Place
<i>khams pa</i>	Khampa				Ethnicity
Ga					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>gar</i>	gar				Term
<i>gung thang</i>	Gungtang				Place
<i>glu gar tshogs pa</i>	Lugar Tsokpa				Organization
<i>dge 'dun chos 'phel</i>	Gendün Chömpel				Person
<i>'gram</i>	Dram				Place
<i>rgyal mtha'</i>	Gyelta				Place
<i>rgyu rtsal slob grwa</i>	Gyutsel Lapdra	Art School			Organization
<i>sgor bro</i>	gordro	circle dance			Term
<i>sgor gzhas</i>	gorzhé	circle dance			Term
<i>sgra snyan</i>	dranyen	Tibetan lute			Term
Cha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>chung zhol sgrol ma</i>	Chungzhöl Drölma				Person
Ja					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>'jam dbyangs bzhad pa</i>	Jamyang Zhepa				Person
Ta					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>stod gzhas</i>	tözhé				Term
<i>bstan 'dzin</i>	Tendzin				Person

Tha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>thang go la</i>	Tanggola				Building
Da					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>dar rtse mdo</i>	Dartsedo		Chi. <i>Kangding</i>		Place
<i>bdud be</i>	Dübé				Person
<i>bde chen dbang mo</i>	Dechen Wangmo				Person
<i>'dam gzhung</i>	Damzhung				Place
<i>'dres ma</i>	drema	mixed			Term
<i>rdung len</i>	dunglen				Term
<i>rdo re</i>	Doré				Person
Na					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>nag chu</i>	Nakchu				Place
<i>nang ma</i>	nangma	nightclub			Term
<i>nang ma 'i skyid sdug</i>	Nangmé Kyiduk				Organization
<i>nam mkha'</i>	Namkha				Person
Pa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>dpal sgron lags</i>	Peldrönlā				Person
Pha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>pha yul</i>	payül	native area			Term
Ba					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>ba pa phun tshogs dbang rgyal</i>	Bapa Püntsok Wanggyel				Person
<i>byang thang</i>	Jangtang				Place
<i>byams pa tshe ring</i>	Jampa Tsering				Person
<i>bla brang</i>	Labrang				Place
<i>dbus gtsang</i>	Ütsang				Place
<i>dbyangs can lha mo</i>	Yangchen Lhamo				Person
<i>'ba' thang</i>	Batang				Place
<i>'ba' gzhaz</i>	bazhé				Term
<i>'brog glu</i>	droklu	nomad song			Term
Ma					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rma chu</i>	Machu				Place
Tsa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>brtse thang</i>	Tsetang				Place

Tsha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>tshé dbang</i>	Tsewang				Person
Dza					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rdza chu kha</i>	Dzachukha				Place
<i>rdzong</i>	dzong	county	Chi. <i>xian</i>		Term
Zha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>zho ston</i>	Zhotön	Yogurt Festival			Festival
<i>gzhis ka rtse</i>	Zhikatsé				Place
Za					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>zla sgron</i>	Dadrön				Person
<i>zlos gar tshogs pa</i>	Dögar Tsokpa				Organization
<i>gzi mig dgu pa</i>	Zimik Gupa				Organization
Ya					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>yangs pa chen</i>	Yangpachen				Place
<i>yar 'drong</i>	Yardrong				Person
<i>yul shul</i>	Yülshül				Place
<i>gyu sgron</i>	Yudrön				Person
<i>gyung drung rgyal</i>	Yungdrung Argya				Person
Ra					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>ral pa</i>	relpa				Term
La					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>li thang</i>	Litang				Place
<i>blo bzang tshé ring</i>	Lopzang Tsering				Person
Sa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>gser shul</i>	Sershül				Place
<i>bsod nams dbang mo</i>	Sönam Wangmo				Person
Ha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>lha mo</i>	lhamo				Term
<i>lha mo tshogs pa</i>	Lhamo Tsokpa				Organization
<i>lha sa</i>	Lhasa				Place
<i>lho kha</i>	Lhokha				Place
A					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>a ce lha mo</i>	Aché Lhamo				Term

<i>a mdo</i>	Amdo				Place
<i>a mdo snga pa</i>	Amdo Ngapa				Place
<i>a ba sgor bro</i>	aba gordro				Term
<i>a ma lhag pa</i>	Ama Lhakpa			1909-1997	Person
Chinese					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Chinese	Dates	Type
			<i>Beijing</i>		Place
			<i>Chengdu</i>		Place
			<i>Gannan</i>		Place
			<i>Gansu</i>		Place
			<i>Jiang Zemin</i>		Person
			<i>Luding</i>		Place
			<i>Qinghai</i>		Place
<i>shang</i>	shang		<i>xiang</i>		Term
			<i>Shuanlu</i>		Place
			<i>Sichuan</i>		Place
		Great Development of the West	<i>xibu da kaifa</i>		Term
			<i>Xining</i>		Place

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