

Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines

Studies in The Tibetan Performing Arts

Edited by Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy



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Studies in The Tibetan Performing Arts

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Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy

Studying the Tibetan Performing Arts: A Bibliographic Introduction (1986-2017) pp. 05-54

Cuilan Liu

Regulating the Performing Arts: Buddhist Canon Law on the Performance and Consumption of Music in Tibet pp. 55-91

Michael Monhart

Listening with the Gods: Offering, Beauty and Being in Tibetan Ritual Music pp. 92-102

Sangye Dondhup

Looking Back at Tibetan Performing Arts Research by Tibetans in the People's Republic of China: Advocating for an Anthropological Approach pp. 103-125

Tatsuya Yamamoto

Lyrics Matter: Reconsidering Agency in the Discourses and Practices of Tibetan Pop Music among Tibetan Refugees pp. 126-152

Kati Fitzgerald

Lineage in the Digital Age: Didactic Practices of the Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association and Tibet University Arts Department Tibetan Opera Class pp. 153-178

Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy

The Art of the Tibetan Actor: *A lce lha mo* in the gaze of Western Performance Theories pp. 179-215

Notes on Contributors

pp. 216-217



Studying the Tibetan Performing Arts: A Bibliographic Introduction (1986-2017)

Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy

(Université Laval)

The original idea that prompted this special issue of *Revue d'études tibétaines* (RET) was to publish the papers presented at the conference "Tibetan Performance, Past and present: Multidisciplinary avenues of research" held at Columbia University in New York on 12 November 2012. This one-day conference was organized by Kati Fitzgerald and Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, with the help of Tashi Tsering (Amnye Machen Institute), and benefitted from the support of the Center for Ethnomusicology at Columbia University (through Ana Ochoa) and Columbia University's Department for East Asian Languages and Cultures (through Gray Tuttle), as well as the Rubin Foundation.¹ Unfortunately, only a third of the nine papers presented at the conference finally made their way into this issue: those of Kati Fitzgerald, Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy and Michael Monhart. Given the absolute rarity of academic events devoted to the Tibetan performing arts, it is valuable to mention here the six presentations that could unfortunately not make it into this issue. They testify to the broad scope of the contributions, addressing the vast category of 'performing arts' in the Tibetan context by looking at terminological history, music, monastic dance, religious ritual, film and even television shows:

Pema Bhum & Kristina Dy-Liacco, "Tibetan Performing Arts in Trace Foundation's Latse Library's Audio-visual Collections".

Robert Barnett, "Tibetan religious dance and ritual in socialist cinema and television dramas, 1928 to the present day".

Luo Wenhua, "Cham Performance in Emperor Qianlong's Court".

Mona Schrempf, "Not only for the Tourist Gaze: Performing the State and Monastic Power at the Gomphu Kora Tsechu Festival". This was followed by a Screening of the ethnographic film 'Gomphu Kora Tsechu, a pilgrimage festival in Eastern Bhutan' (30 min., 2012) by Mona Schrempf.

¹ For a review of this conference, see Kathy Foley, 2013, "Tibetan Performance, Past and present: Multidisciplinary avenues of research", *Asian Theatre Journal*, 30 (2), pp. 520-525.

Jessie Amelia Wallner, "'Tracking' Tibetan Music: The Evolution of Sound Recording Technology and its Impact on Tibetan Communities".

Tashi Tsering (Amnye Machen Institute), "*Rtsed-sna, zlos-gar, rig-rtsal*. A discussion of performance terminology through history and thoughts for future research".

Three Asian scholars also contributed to the completion of this issue. They have extensively researched Tibetan performing arts, either by examining their treatment in Buddhist classical literature (Cuilan Liu), by following the vicissitudes of exile pop music in India and Nepal (Tatsuya Yamamoto), or by surveying, as a researcher in a government work unit, many traditional Tibetan drama and performance traditions within the People's Republic of China (Sangye Dondhup).

1 – The Scope of 'Performing Arts'

As was the case at the Columbia University Conference mentioned above, this RET issue rests on a very wide understanding of the category of 'performing arts'. These are usually thought to comprise three elements: music/song, dance, and drama. In the Tibetan context, song and dance are deeply connected (most dances are sung to, but not all songs are danced to), and instrumental music is marginal. Drama traditions (*a lce lha mo*, *rnam thar*) feature prominent singing and dancing components. But each of these three elements brings immediately to mind adjacent, or interrelated, cultural practices that lead us to broaden the category of 'performing arts':

- Songs are closely related to verbal arts, or the public demonstration of beautiful speech—beautiful in both content and form—, such as the recitation of eulogies, genealogies, poetry, proverbs, folk tales and of course the celebrated Gesar epic.² What has come to be summed up in 'oral literature' is, in turn, deeply interwoven with literary styles, particularly the *mgur/mgul* 'songs' of ecstatic meditators, or those of the 6th Dalai Lama. In performing arts, as elsewhere in Tibetan studies, frontiers are porous.
- Dances are not only done for entertainment. Several religious

² In 2009, the Gesar epic has been inscribed on UNESCO's list of Humanity's Intangible Cultural Heritage, alongside other Tibetan traditions such as the drama tradition of *a lce lha mo*.

ritual traditions, such as *'cham*—that Tibetans adamantly keep in the category of 'religion', separate from 'mundane' activities and shows—rely on distinctive uses of the body and can constitute elaborate 'spectacles' in their own right. Performance studies have long looked at questions of techniques of the body, presence, learning, preparation (including techniques of the mind), transmission and bodies in social and religious context. Therefore, it makes sense from a western scholarly point of view, to carefully depart from Tibetan emic classifications and include selected ritual activities in the category of 'performing arts', namely those 'spectacles', Buddhist or pagan—such as the well-studied *klu rol* in Reb gong—, that attract a substantial amount of onlookers.

- Drama was a significant and far-ranging cultural form in pre-1950s Tibet, but nowadays it seems confined to 'tradition'. Fiction and dramatic techniques have carried over to more 'modern' expressive formats (sometimes with the same drama people involved), such as cinema, videos and even television shows. I believe that these selected cultural productions, usually associated with media studies, can also be included in the wide spectrum of 'Tibetan performing arts', although they are not 'live', in the sense of performers doing something in front of an audience.

Clearly, I am advocating for a large and loose understanding of the scope of 'Tibetan³ performing arts', but it seems fair to leave aside the elements that pertain more specifically to art history and visual studies, such as paintings, murals, statues, jewellery, architectural constructions and photographs, first because their 'tangible' component outdoes the 'intangible' quality that is highlighted in the study of 'performing arts'⁴; and second because, in the Tibetan

³ The complex category of 'Tibetan', and how it has evolved over time, deserves of course a substantial discussion, but it goes well beyond the scope of this introduction. In this context, I shall opt for a rather flexible understanding of 'Tibetan' as including all the people who speak Tibetic languages, also those in the western, southern and eastern margins of the Tibetan plateau. It is important to stress here, though, that the use of a single adjective, 'Tibetan', does not entail a cultural uniformity across the whole category. Diversity and friction within Tibetans are huge and should be accounted for in research much more than they presently are.

⁴ That being said, intangible performances do actually rely on 'material culture', for instance costumes and textiles, masks, props, votive objects used by the performers (thangkas, statues, reliquaries) as well as technological devices used in learning and transmission (librettos, texts, drawings, recordings and recording

studies context, art history does already exist as a field in its own right and has garnered a substantial amount of attention and publications.

2 – A Relatively Neglected Field

So, what does the field of 'Tibetan performing arts' look like in western academia?⁵ Secular aspects of Tibetan expressive culture, such as songs and dances, have long held a marginal, even neglected, place in Tibetan studies. One reason may be the ideological focus, within Tibetan culture itself, on spiritual liberation, looking down on activities that are not conducive to enlightenment. To the exception of a few authors, Tibetan religious masters and historians have paid little attention to music, dance or drama, considering them neither a worthwhile area of study, nor an enviable activity to engage in. However, in practice, these activities are everywhere in the social fabric of Tibetans. They denote happiness and are associated with each and every celebration, even religious festivities. They are extremely significant vectors of culture, at least in the way anthropologists understand and value 'culture', sometimes at odds with Buddhist orthodoxy about what is worthwhile and what is not. They allow for a deep and wide gaze into the preoccupations and practices of Tibetans. They convey a sense of history, knowledge, values, and can express creatively current predicaments and sometimes even criticism. Just considering the emotional and political impact of modern songs today, especially in Tibet, or the cultural impact of movies among the youth, testifies to the relevance of these cultural productions to understand contemporary Tibetan issues.

Surprisingly, academic events dedicated to Tibetan performing arts have been rare. Nearly all of them consist of panels convened at the successive seminars of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS), and many of them have unfortunately not been published. Most recently, there have been IATS panels entitled "Music", "Gesar", and "Ritual, ceremony and performance" (2003); "New investigations on the epic of King Gesar" and "Modern Tibetan culture" (2006); "Religious and Secular Performance" (2010); "Performing arts and musical traditions", "New research on the

instruments). These aspects all qualify to the scope of 'performing arts' studies. These material dimensions are, as a matter of fact, the most lacking in the extant research on the performing arts.

⁵ Ses Sangye Dondhup's contribution in this issue for an overview of research on the performing arts done by Tibetans in the People's Republic of China.

Gesar epic in Tibet”, and “Tibetan and Mongolian ritual dance” (2013)—no panel was convened on the topic at the last IATS seminar in 2016, not even on Gesar. There have been a couple of conferences on Tibetan rituals, the proceedings of which are now edited as books,⁶ examining solely ‘religious’ rituals, and not looking at the performative, sensuous, visual, or musical dimensions of these practices. Tibetans in Asia, whether in Dharamsala or in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have held multiple meetings on music or drama since the 1980s, yet these events mostly attended by performers and were geared towards a folkloristic compiling approach, rather than a contextual and critical appraisal of performance.

In other words, since the landmark publication of the book edited by Jamyang Norbu in 1986,⁷ bringing together eleven contributions on “*Zlos gar: The Performing Traditions of Tibet*” by the most prominent scholars of the topic at the time, the field of Tibetan performing arts has still not taken off. Research appears scattered: a few scholars, especially ethnomusicologists, among whom Mireille Helffer and Anna Morcom,⁸ as well as myself for drama and some music styles, have tried to write consistently about one form or other of Tibetan performance; but many publications are ‘occasional’ contributions by scholars whose main, or more recent, interests lie outside the realm of performances.

To further describe the field, we should say that knowledge is not only scattered, and even sometimes difficult to get hold of if one is not aware of specific publications, but also *fragmented*. As is the case for the whole of Tibetan studies, research on the performing arts is marked by a form of insularity stemming from two factors. First, the difficulty in gaining access to many Tibetan areas within the PRC entails that western researchers converge to relatively more open areas, such as northern Amdo since the 2000s, while research in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), that used to be at the forefront of Tibetan studies, has since shrunk significantly. That explains why there are multiple studies on a single ritual (e.g. the *klu rol* in Reb

⁶ Cabezon José I. (ed.), 2010, *Tibetan Ritual*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Buffetrille Katia (ed.), 2012, *Revisiting Rituals in a Changing Tibetan World*. Leiden, Brill.

⁷ Jamyang Norbu (ed.), 1986, *Zlos-Gar. Performing traditions of Tibet. Commemorative issue on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (1959-84)*. Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

⁸ The previous generation of ethnomusicologists of Tibet, such as Ter Ellingson and Ricardo Canzio, who were prolific until the mid-1980s, has not continued to publish on the topic. Mireille Helffer, whose publications since the mid-1960s span a stunning 50 years, is the most persistent and prolific researcher of the whole field.

gong, Amdo, which has attracted at least seven researchers, who have produced over ten articles on the subject), while studies of performances and rituals in other parts of Amdo, and all the more in Central Tibet and in Kham, are painfully lacking. Second, all researchers are steeped in their own social networks, that shape decisively the scope of their experience of Tibetan culture in general—in the PRC as in exile, experiences and expressions of Tibetanness vary greatly across geographic, subcultural and social factors. Researchers tend to see things, not “from the native’s point of view”, as Bronislaw Malinowski famously phrased anthropology’s project,⁹ but more modestly from their friends’ point of view. This is common to all the social sciences, but there is also a certain degree of parochialism within Tibetan societies themselves. Therefore, friendships and loyalties cultivated by researchers over long stays in a given *milieu* do colour in strong ways their analysis and resulting publications. Parochialism is known among Tibetans mostly on religious or regional grounds, but it may take other forms as well. For example, if one relies on, let’s say, an Amdowa research partner from a particular region, from a specific generation (age), with a given education background, and with precise views on the current Tibetan predicament, to write about the whole of Tibetan music, and if that person has not had extensive experiences in other Tibetan regions, the account will unavoidably be biased towards favouring the Amdo traditions he knows about—likewise for any other type of positionality of our research partners and informants. Overall publications available in the PRC, which frequently copy and recycle simplifications produced by Chinese and Tibetan state folklorists, are not a reliable way to go around the lack of a direct experience of the realities discussed; one has to know how to choose and how to read those publications. In sum, in its present state, the field of Tibetan performing arts consists of a series of fragmented depictions and investigations gathered at various times and places by variously positioned researchers, and it is still premature to produce a satisfying and fair overall picture.

Furthermore, Tibetan performing arts is a field characterised by a large number of unpublished B.A. research papers,¹⁰ and M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations: after their completion, many young scholars have chosen to either not pursue an academic career, or to reorient their

⁹ See Clifford Geertz’ (1974) appraisal of Malinowski’s phrase in his well-known essay “From the Native’s Point of View”: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding”, in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 28 (1) (Oct., 1974), pp. 26-45.

¹⁰ I have included many SIT (Student International training) study abroad program research papers available online.

attention towards topics closer to mainstream Tibetology, Anthropology or Buddhology. It may be the case that, for early career anthropologists, studying Tibetan performing arts is perceived more as a challenge than as a viable option. To be successful, one has to juggle with, on one side, being productive with publications that respond to the theoretical expectations of the discipline—fashionable key concepts that are all the rage in other cultural settings, but that don't seem to work so well in the complex Tibetan case—and on the other side, a marked strain in gathering research data—because of the linguistic requirements imposed on researchers, who have to go through a long training to master Tibetan and Chinese;¹¹ and because of the increasing difficulty, in the current PRC political climate, to carry out meaningful fieldwork.¹² To make matters worse, I shall add that the 'standard' (observation, experience, interview) methods of the anthropologist are often insufficient to give a grounded account of Tibetan songs, dances and drama, especially at a time when, in a quickly shifting society, young informants have not had first-hand experience of the social and cultural 'traditions' of their elders, and may provide the visiting researcher with questionable statements and explanations, repeating simplistic ideas circulating around, sometimes even State propaganda. Ideally, the anthropologist of the Tibetan performing arts should seek to practice some of the historian's rigour and depth of field, and a lot of the philologist's vigilant grasp of subtle, situated, multiple and shifting meanings of what is said and written. It is especially true for contemporary Tibetan cultural production within the PRC. It is tempting for some scholars to display their analytic skills and readily propose sweeping interpretations of Tibetan identity, resistance, agency, or assimilation within China, but caution, and situating the discussion within geographic, subcultural and social limits should be explicit at all times.

This leads onto another important question when dealing with cultural production by Tibetans in the PRC: it is indeed a thriving industry, but given the current repressive conditions weighing on intellectuals and artists, especially singers, is it wise, let alone ethical, to be transparent and tell it all out in western publications? These

¹¹ Or, for the researchers working in exile, the local languages spoken in the host society: Hindi, Punjabi, Nepali, German, French,...

¹² This refers not only to troubles in getting visas and gaining access to Tibetan areas as foreign nationals, but also the difficulty to carry out immersive fieldworks over long periods of time (the hallmark of anthropology's methodology), to build trust and have relaxed and informative conversations with local people, especially in the Tibet Autonomous Region. But restrictions are growing in all Tibetan regions.

productions are surely in the 'public' space, but making them research cases in the West, and locking their interpretation in antagonising (resistance, defiance, even protest?) political positions, attracts much attention by local and national authorities onto local practices that fare best when they are kept low-profile.

For all of these reasons of access, information, fragmentation, interpretation and ethics in navigating political sensitivities within the PRC, it seems that valuable research opportunities today lie within the emerging pool of Tibetan researchers within the PRC. Some of them have acquired additional academic training abroad. It is also, of course, high time Tibetan scholars reclaimed their own heritage. The ideological and methodological gap between how research is carried out in the PRC and in western countries is still challenging at this point, but fruitful discussions are bound to develop as the Tibetan research will be coming out.

3 - In this issue

The following collection of articles falls short of addressing comprehensively any of the complications listed above. But they testify to the vitality and ingenuity of the field, most of the contributors being young innovative scholars.

The issue opens with two articles rooted in religious texts and Buddhist deliberations, which have been a trademark of the field of Tibetan performance studies since the start. Cuilan Liu surveys a vast body of Buddhist Indic and Tibetan literature to see how Buddhist regulations have attempted to control the consumption and performance of music, dance and drama by ordained monks. These practices are condemned in Canon law, yet they came to be accepted in Tibetan society, so, how has the contradiction been resolved? Michael Monhart attempts to open a black box: what happens in the mind of the religious practitioner when he offers ritual music to the gods? Looking first at aesthetics and notions of the 'beautiful', he then uses Paul Ricœur's theories of emplotment and 'being-as' to investigate the motivations and state of mind of the performer.

Sangye Dondhup proposes a retrospective and contextualization of nearly forty years of research about Tibetan performing arts carried out by Tibetan researchers in the PRC. He presents the strengths and challenges of the most noteworthy publications in Tibetan and Chinese and concludes with what he considers a promising approach for future studies. Tatsuya Yamamoto shifts the focus over to the Tibetan exiles of India and Nepal. He looks at the current production of pop songs, and analyses how the quality and

the mode of writing of the lyrics has evolved over the last twenty years. That brings him to reflect on the specific agency of both refugee singers and audiences, and how it has brought about unintended consequences.

The last two articles are written by researchers first trained in western drama before researching *a lce lha mo*. Kati Fitzgerald examines, in Kathmandu and Lhasa, how new technologies such as mobile phones and digital recordings have affected the transmission of knowledge between teacher and actor, and how this comes to challenge assumptions about lineage within the drama tradition. Finally, Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy reconsiders the work *lha mo* actors on the stage in the light of her training in drama school and western theories and assumptions about acting, presence and embodiment.

4 – A Retrospective Overview (1986-2017)

To close this introduction, it may be of worth to offer the following bibliography summing up the “state of research” on Tibetan performing arts, to quote part of the title of Peter Crossley’s 1967 well-known essay.¹³ The next milestone came a little less than twenty years later, with Jamyang Norbu’s edited book (1986) mentioned above, “*Zlos-Gar. Performing traditions of Tibet*”. More than thirty years have since passed: an update is long overdue. I have thus set 1986 as a starting date and tried to survey the major pieces produced in Western languages¹⁴ until the current year, dividing the data into twelve headings:

- 1) General presentations of Tibetan music or performing arts
- 2) Music in a religious context
- 3) Monastic dances (*cham[s]*)
- 4) Literary ‘songs’: *mgur* by Milarepa, mad yogins, the 6th Dalai Lama and other meditative ‘song’-poems
- 5) Verbal arts: speeches, proverbs, folk tales, comedy, *lama mani*
- 6) The Gesar epic

¹³ Crossley-Holland Peter, 1967, "The State of Research in Tibetan Folk Music", in *Journal of the society for ethnomusicology*, Vol. XI - n° 2, pp. 170-187 [reprinted in Jamyang Norbu (ed.), 1986. *Zlos-Gar. Performing traditions of Tibet. Commemorative issue on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (1959-84)*. Dharamsala : Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, pp. 105-124].

¹⁴ See Sangye Dondhup’s contribution in this issue for a contrasting review of the scholarship on performing arts produced by Tibetans in the People’s Republic of China, in both Tibetan and Chinese.

- 7) Drama, *a lce lha mo*
- 8) Descriptions of 'spectacular' lay rituals, *klu rol*
- 9) Traditional/folk music and dance
- 10) Pop music, world music and contemporary genres
- 11) Cinema, films, videos
- 12) Broadcast media: television, radio

I have introduced each section with short comments.

These sources are scattered, sometimes hard to come by, and many of them are unpublished dissertations. I believe there is worth in bringing together studies in these twelve areas of research, hoping that it will entice future scholars to read more widely than their specialised topic and enrich their analysis. It may also help young scholars, who may at times overlook the valuable research done in a not-so-distant past, or carried out in other areas of the Tibetan cultural world.

I have tried to be exhaustive, but any endeavour of this kind is of course doomed to fail. I have left out countless unpublished conference papers, numerous blog entries and newspaper articles, that are often less than a page long, and don't provide much informative content. I was limited by my linguistic skills and looked mainly at sources accessible to me, in English, French, German or Italian. I apologize to the authors whose work I have missed, and I invite them to join the conversation and renew the field of Tibetan performance studies.

Thematic Bibliography (1986-2017)¹⁵

1. General presentations of Tibetan music or performing arts

Helffer has provided the only book (2000-b, transl. 2004) on the whole range of Tibetan music and performance traditions, and it is the most useful start, for those who can read Italian or French. Writing a fair and representative encyclopaedia article is a challenging mission, given the fragmented nature of the accessible data. Combining the expertise of several scholars may be the best option: the 2001 'Tibet' entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and musicians*, featuring 13 sections written by 9 scholars still stands as most detailed and balanced description, especially in comparison with the PRC-biased article by Mao Jizeng (2002-b), with

¹⁵ All of the URLs mentioned in the bibliography have last been accessed in late May 2017.

unrecognizable Tibetan terminology given in pinyin, and with classifications that are absent from Tibetan understandings. Temple's online bibliography (2012) is very useful, especially for finding old materials—the oldest one dated 1896—but it is neither systematic nor complete, especially for recent research materials.

2001, "Tibet", in Stanley Sadie (ed.), the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and musicians*. London, Macmillan, Vol. 25, pp. 441-460.

Sections by multiple authors:

- "I. Background, History and Research", Carole Pegg p. 441.
- "II. Monastic music—1. Liturgical Chant and Music. i. Bön", Ricardo Canzio, pp. 441-443.
- "II. Monastic music—1. Liturgical Chant and Music. ii. Buddhist Schools—3. Instruments—4. Notation", Mireille Helffer, pp. 441-449.
- "II. Monastic music—2. 'Cham", Mona Schrempf, pp. 444-445.
- "III. Traditional Music—1. Folk Music—6. Instruments", Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy & Tsereng Dondhup, pp. 449-460.
- "III. Traditional Music—2. *Gar*", Mark Trewin, p. 452.
- "III. Traditional Music—4. The Gesar Epic", Geoffrey Samuel, pp. 455-456.
- "III. Traditional Music—3. Nangma—5. *Lha-mo*", Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, pp. 452-457.
- "IV. Contemporary Music", Laetitia Luzi, p. 458.

Chopathar Wayemache (Ma, Jiao Ba Ta), 1998, *Musical Arts in Tibet: selected essays (translated from the Chinese by Shih Pu Wang and Kristina Dy-Liacco). Volume prepared by Kristina Dy-Liacco and Lauran Hartley on the occasion of the Tibetan Music Festival held in Bloomington, Indiana, on April 2-5 1997*. Bloomington.

Fitzgerald Kati, 2016, "Tibetan Dance", "Tibetan Music", "Tibetan Masks", *passim* in Chapter Five (Dance in Traditional Asian Theatre), Chapter Six (Music in Traditional Asian Theatre), and Chapter Seven (Masks in Traditional Asian Theatre), in Liu Siyuan (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*. London, Routledge.

Helffer Mireille, 1997, "Bibliography of Himalayan Music", *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, Vols. 12-13, pp. 222-239.

Helffer Mireille, 1998, "Tibet, Bhutan, Ladakh", in Friedrich Blume & Ludwig Finscher (eds.), *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*, Vol. 9. Kassel: Bärenreiter, pp. 572-598.

Helffer Mireille, 2000-a, "Tibetan culture in Southeast Asia", in A. Arnold (ed.), *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 5, South Asia, pp. 709-717.

Helffer Mireille, 2000-b, *Musiche dal Tetto del mondo*. Turin, Testo &

immagine.

Helfffer Mireille, 2004, *Musiques du toit du monde: l'univers sonore des populations de culture tibétaine*. Paris, L'Harmattan.

Jamyang Norbu (ed.), 1986, *Zlos-Gar. Performing traditions of Tibet. Commemorative issue on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (1959-84)*. Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

Jamyang Norbu, 1986, "Introduction. The role of performing arts in old Tibetan society", in Jamyang Norbu (ed.), *Zlos-Gar. Performing traditions of Tibet. Commemorative issue on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (1959-84)*. Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, pp. 1-6.

Mao Jizeng, 2002-a, "The Music of China's Minorities: An Overview", in Robert C. Provine, Yoshiko Tokumaru and J. Lawrence Witzleben (eds.), *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music* (Vol. 7: East Asia, China, Japan and Korea). London / New York, Routledge, pp. 447-469.

Mao Jizeng, 2002-b, "The traditional music of Tibet", in Robert C. Provine, Yoshiko Tokumaru and J. Lawrence Witzleben (eds.), *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music* (Vol. 7: East Asia, China, Japan and Korea). London / New York, Routledge, pp. 471-484.

Roche Gerald & Rinchen Khar, forthcoming, "Tibet and Tibetans", *SAGE Encyclopaedia of Music and Culture*. Draft accessible https://www.academia.edu/21430905/Tibet_and_Tibetans_SAGE_Encyclopaedia_of_Music_and_Culture

Temple Erwan, 2012, "Short Bibliography on Tibetan Performing Arts & Religious Dances". URL:

https://www.academia.edu/4357074/Erwan_Temple_Short_Bibliography_on_Tibetan_Performing_Arts_and_Religious_Dances

Trewin Mark, 2000, "Raising the roof", in Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham & Richard Trillo (eds.), *World Music, the Rough guide* (Vol. 2: Latin & North America, Caribbean, India, Asia and Pacific). London, Penguin, pp. 254-261.

2. Music in a religious context

This subfield is still one of the most prolific of the twelve sections proposed in this bibliographic essay. Topics include music in/as ritual, musical lineages, vocal and instrumental music, organology and instruments, notation, fieldwork methods, the social role of monasteries in the preservation of musical heritage, music played by nuns, as well as music in Buddhist regulations. Helfffer's work stands

out as being the most prolific, touching on virtually all of these subjects.

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3. *Monastic dances ('cham[s])*¹⁶

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4. Literary 'songs': *mgur* by Milarepa¹⁷, mad yogins¹⁸, the 6th Dalai Lama and other meditative 'song'-poems

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5. Verbal arts: speeches, proverbs, folk tales, comedy, lama mani

¹⁹ Let us mention here important and not so well-known source materials prior to 1986, since folk tales were an important topic of research before Westerner researchers could travel to Tibet in the 1980s: O'Connor W.F.T. (transl.), 1977 [1906], *Folk tales from Tibet, with illustrations by a Tibetan artist & some verses from Tibetan love-songs*. Kathmandu, RPB (Bibliotheca Himalayica series 2, v.11), Rinjing Dorjee (ed.), 1975, *Tales of Uncle Tompa: The legendary rascal of Tibet*. S.I., Dorje-Ling. Norbu Chophel, 1984, *Folk Tales of Tibet*. Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. Thurlow Clifford, 1975, *Stories from beyond the clouds. An anthology of Tibetan folk tales*. Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. And finally the seven volumes published under: 1982, *Märchen, Sagen und Schwänke vom Dach der Welt : Tibetisches Erzählgut in Deutscher Fassung*. Sankt Augustin, VGH Wissenschaftsverlag (Beiträge zur Tibetischen Erzählforschung).
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 V.2 : M. Kretschmer, *Erzählungen westtibetischer Viehzüchter*.
 V.3 : R. Bielmeyer & S. Herrmann, *Viehzüchtererzählungen sowie Erzählgut aus sKyid-grong und Ding-ri*.

The heading lists out the content of this section. Many publications are dedicated to Bhutan: I have kept them in a separate section. There are numerous folk tales and stories published in *Asian Highland Perspectives*. I have compiled here the most extensive ones, in book format. Professors heading the ETP (English Tibetan program) at the Qinghai Normal University in Xining (first Kevin Stuart, joined by Gerald Roche), have spearheaded an impressive number of local folk culture data collection projects by their students, mostly from Amdo, that have resulted in joint or single-authored publications (lately, in *Asian Highland Perspectives*). The database of the 'Plateau Culture Heritage Protection Group' (PCHP, formerly the Plateau Music Project) holds very rich "Collections from the Tibetan Plateau 2006-2012".²⁰ Note the very few reference on *lama mani* (Gelle, Tashi Tsering) and the related *bu chen* of Spiti (Sutherland, Dolffus, Kalantari). I have added two articles on playing (Murakami, Loseries), since they are rare accounts of folk culture that does feature speech elements.

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V.4 : J.K. Phukhang & P. Schwieger, Erzählgut A-mdo und Brag-g. gyab.

V.5 : S. Herrmann, *Die tibetische Version des Papageienbuches*.

V.6 : M. Kretschman, *Märchen und Schwänke aus Mustang (Nepal)*.

V.7 : R. Bielmeier, *Das Märchen vom Prinzen Co bzang. Eine tibetische Erzählung aus Baltistan*.

²⁰ <http://www.oralliterature.org/collections/pchpgcollections.html>. Information from the website : "PCHP trains young people from across the Tibetan Plateau to use mobile digital technologies to collect oral traditions within their communities. These materials are then repatriated back to communities in locally appropriate forms, typically VCDs or DVDs. In 2011, a partnership between PCHP and the World Oral Literature Project allowed for the hosting of a significant portion of the PCHP archive. The supporting metadata are available in Tibetan, Chinese, and English."

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8. Descriptions of 'spectacular' lay rituals, *klu rol*

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9. Traditional/folk songs and dances

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10. Pop music, world music and contemporary genres

Most of the publications examine pop music in Tibet, but a few

authors also look at the politics of performances in or from the PRC (Makley 1997, House, s.d., Wang s.d., Bangsbo 2013, International Campaign for Tibet 2013). Some researchers worked among Tibetan exiles (Diehl 1997, 2002; Conrad, 2000, Mouquod 2001, Tardif-Turcotte 2009, Tenzin Nyiwoe 2011, Yamamoto 2013, Morcom 2015-a, forthcoming-a, Cupchik, forthcoming-a,) or wrote about the invented tradition of singing bowls (Joffe 2015, Yamamoto 2015-a). Political repression is also addressed (Dechen Pemba, s.d., 2014)²⁵. Other studies have focused on Amdo (Mouquod 2001, 2003; Cromphout 2005, Ellwanger 2005, Savolainen s.d., Lama Jabb 2011) or on Chinese appropriations of Tibetan culture and music (Upton 2002, Baranovitch 2009, 2016; Yang 2014), or similar processes in the USA (Congdon 2007).

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Regulating the Performing Arts: Buddhist Canon Law on the Performance and Consumption of Music in Tibet

Cuilan Liu

Buddhist canon law prohibits its lay and monastic adherents from performing, teaching, or watching song (Skt. *gīta*; Ch. *ge* 歌; Tib. *glu*), dance (Skt. *nṛta*; Ch. *wu* 舞; Tib. *gar*), or instrumental music (Skt. *vādita*; Ch. *jiyue* 伎樂; Tib. *rol mo*) to varying degrees.¹ Yet, renowned Buddhist masters and high-ranking monks in Tibet regularly ‘violated’ this prohibition. For the Tibetan yogin Mi la ras pa (1040-1123) and the Dge lugs pa monk abbot Shar Skal ldan rgya mtsho (1607-1677), composing and performing songs of spiritual realization (*mgur glu*) were a means of sharing experiences that were acquired through solitary religious practice. In *A Happy Feast for the Eyes, Mind, and Ears* (*Mig yid rna ba’i dga’ ston*), a late seventeenth century songbook with notes on melodies whose compilation was attributed to the Tibetan regent (Sde srid) Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705), two local regents from western Tibet (Gtsang)—Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (1586? -1621) and Bstan skyong dbang po (1606-1642)—were said to have established a form of court music (*gar glu*) under their regime in the early seventeenth century.² After that regime collapsed in 1641, this form of music was brought to the court of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang Blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-

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¹ Hereafter, the Tibetan spellings of terms will be provided in brackets without the abbreviation Tib. Only Skt. and Ch. will be added for Sanskrit and Chinese terms respectively. For a detailed study of rules in Buddhist canon law that prohibit fully ordained Buddhist monks and nuns from performing, teaching, or consuming song, dance, and instrumental music, see Liu 2014.

² See Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1991: 1-4. For an extensive study of this songbook, see Dge ‘dun ‘phel rgyas 2008; 2009.

1682). This is corroborated by the fact that musical performance had become a form of primary entertainment on numerous occasions in the court of the Fifth Dalai Lama from the second half of the seventeenth century onward. The Fifth Dalai Lama recorded one such occasion in his autobiography, noting that he had entertained various lay and monastic guests with musical performances on New Year's Day in 1681.³ Given the prohibition in Buddhist canon law against ordained Buddhists performing, teaching, or watching song, dance, or instrumental music, was it not a violation for the Fifth Dalai Lama to arrange such musical performances to entertain his guests, many of whom would likely have been high-ranking monks? Why is there no recorded criticism of him for doing so? How did the Tibetans reconcile the discrepancy between the precept and practice of monastic regulations regarding music performance and consumption?

To address these questions, I have identified twenty-nine Indic and Tibetan texts elaborating on the disciplinary rules for ordained Buddhist novice monks and nuns in order to trace the continuities and changes in the interpretation of this rule against music that occurred through the transmission and development of this literary tradition from India to Tibet. Only commentaries on rules for novice monks and nuns provide further explanation of the prohibition against music. While the prohibition against music is also found in disciplinary rules for fully ordained monks and nuns, detailed discussion of this prohibition is only found in commentaries on disciplinary rules for novice monks and nuns. For this reason, these commentaries are the primary sources for my paper.

The literary tradition of novice rules represented by these Indic and Tibetan texts evolved around two central works.⁴ They are fifty stanzas of *Āryamūlasarvāstivādiśramaṇerakārikā* ('*Phags pa gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba'i dge tshul gyi tshig le'ur byas pa*), hereafter abbreviated as NĀ, which is attributed to the second-century Indian scholar Nāgārjuna, and three hundred stanzas of *Āryamūlasarvāstivādiśramaṇerakārikā* ('*Phags pa gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba'i dge tshul gyi tshig le'ur byas pa*), hereafter abbreviated as ŚA, which is attributed to Śākyaprabha, a much later Indian scholar who was traditionally

³ For a description of this New Year event, see Ngag dbang Blo bzang rgya mtsho 1991: vol.3, 403-404. The Fifth Dalai Lama also wrote that monks from the Mgnā'ris College had lined up and performed a dance and song of the Bumping Harvest Festival to welcome him (*mnga' ris grwa tshang gis gser sbrengs dang 'on skor gyis bro gzhas rgyas pa bstar*). See Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1991: vol.1, 328. The Bumping Harvest Festival (*'ong skor*) is usually held in Tibet prior to the autumn harvest.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of connections in the structure and content of these texts, see Liu (forthcoming).

considered to be a disciple of the seventh-century Indian scholar Guṇaprabha. A third equally influential text is Śākyaprabha's auto-commentary on ŚĀ, *Āryamūlasarvāstivādiśramaṇerakārikāvṛtti-prabhāvati* ('Phags pa gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba'i dge tshul gyi tshig le'ur byas pa'i 'grel pa 'od ldan), hereafter abbreviated as ĀBH.

Appendix 1 provides a complete list of the twenty-nine texts.⁵ Among them, nine are Indic texts preserved in the Tibetan Buddhist canon *Bstan 'gyur*; nine are early eleventh to thirteenth century Tibetan commentaries preserved in the recently published *The Collected Writings of the Bka' gdams School* (*Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs bsgrigs*);⁶ and eleven are later Tibetan commentaries dated from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century. Twenty-five of these are examined in detail in this article. Four are excluded for lack of detailed discussion regarding the rule concerning song, dance, and instrumental music.⁷

Defining Performing Arts

Central to any discussion of the regulations of song, dance, and instrumental music in Buddhist canon law is the definition of these terms. In the Tibetan translation of Nāgārjuna's NĀ, these terms are rendered as song (*glu*), dance (*gar*), and cymbal (*sil snyan*). The same set of terms in Śākyaprabha's ŚĀ is translated in Tibetan as dance (*bro gar*), song (*glu*), and instrumental music (*rol mo*). Among the Indian authors, only Kamalaśīla and Vinītadeva elaborate on the characteris-

⁵ For transliterations of the sections on the rule concerning song, dance, and instrumental music, see the Appendixes in Liu 2014.

⁶ These nine texts were identified from the first three collections published in 2006, 2007, and 2009, respectively. I was unable to access the texts in the fourth collection published in 2015 for this article, but I will examine them in the near future.

⁷ Among the texts listed in Appendix 1, N1, N2, K7, and T9b are excluded from the discussion in the present article. The author of the first Indic text N1 is unknown. Its colophon indicates that the Kashmir preceptor Narasadeva translated it in collaboration with the Tibetan monk translator Rgyal ba'i shes rab. This text enumerates the duties of a newly ordained novice monk in the first year of training. This text has been omitted from the following discussion because it only lists the ten rules for the novice monks and provides no discussion of the rule concerning song, dance, and instrumental music. The other Indic text N2 is also omitted from discussion for the same reason. Its colophon dates the text to Nāgārjuna and indicates that the Tibetan translator Gzhon nu'i zhabs from Rtse thang translated it. The text describes the ritual for conferring the novice precepts and only mentions the rule concerning song, dance, and instrumental music without further explanation. The third text K7 is a brief summary of Śākyaprabha's auto-commentary of a text elaborating the rules for novices that I will introduce below. The last text T9b was also excluded here due to its lack of detailed discussion of the rule concerning music.

tics of song, dance, and instrumental music in significant detail. In his commentary on NĀ, Kamalaśīla defines song as singing from the Gandhāra region of western India and from eastern India (*glu ni shar dang gan da ra la sogs pa'o*). In the Tibetan translation, the Tibetan word *shar*, which literally means “east”, refers to an eastern musical tradition as opposed to the Gandhāra tradition of the west. Dance, on the other hand, is defined by Kamalaśīla as the moving to and fro of the feet and the twisting of the body (*gar ni rkang lag g.yob cing lus sgyur bar byed pa'o*).⁸

In the other literary tradition centered on Śākyaprabha's ŚĀ, commentators shift to define song, dance, and instrumental music by introducing the psychological aspects of these activities. In his commentary on ŚĀ, Vinitadeva writes,

*gang cung zhig rgod pa'i bsam pas lus rab tu skyod par byed pa
ni gar yin la | | gang cung zhig de nyid kyi bsam pas dbyangs
len par byed pa ni glu yin no | | brdung bar bya ba dag ni
gang 'ga' zhig tu rdza rnga dang rnga bo che dag la tha na sor
mo dag gis kyang rim gyis sam | go rims ma yin pas rdung bar
byed cing rab tu skyod par byed pa yin te | |*⁹

Dance is the mere movement of the body caused by wild mind (*rgod bag*). Song is the performance of melody caused by a similar wild mind. Striking [instruments] is the mere striking or moving of the finger on the clay drum and big drum.

Tibetan commentators long paid attention to the physical and psychological aspects of song, dance, and instrumental music. Those that focused on the physical aspects defined song, dance, and instrumental music in relation to moving the body or producing sound with musical instruments. Rgyal tshabs Dar ma rin chen (1364-1432), a principle student of Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419), comments that singing involves the movement of the throat (*mgrin pa*), dancing begins with the movement of the eyebrow (*smin ma*), and playing instrumental music entails producing sounds with musical instruments. Identical definitions of song, dance, and instrumental music in relation to the origins of the sound or movement are also found in commentaries of Gu ge yongs 'dzin Blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1748-1813), 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912), Glag

⁸ L4: 782.

⁹ S2: 625. For a detailed study of various drums, including the clay drum and the big drum, see Scheidegger 1988: 31-36.

bla Bsod nam mchog 'grub (1862-1944), and Brag dkar Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin snyan grags (1866-1928).

Apart from the emphasis on the physical aspects of these musical activities, the earlier Tibetan commentators from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries also stress the importance of the utterance of words in establishing a definition of song. Phwya pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109-1169) writes in his commentary on ŚĀ that the defining characteristics of song include both the "moving of the throat (*'grin 'gur*" and "the utterance of verses (*tshigs su bcad par longs pa*)." Similar interpretations are also found in a commentary by Sbal ti Brtson 'grus dbang phyugs (1129-1215) on ĀBH and another by the twelfth century scholar Rog Chos kyi dbang phyug. In another commentary on ĀBH, the Vinaya master from Bya Brtson 'grus 'bar (1091-1167) only mentions the utterance of verses (*tshigs su bcad pa longs*) and describes "knowledge of the word (*ngag gi rig byed*)" as the defining characteristics of song (*klu'i mtshan nyid*).¹⁰ Yet, this slight variation in the definition of song does not separate the Bya Vinaya master from other commentators, as he, like the authors of the other commentaries, also considers "movement of the eyebrow (*smin ma bskyod pa*)" to be a defining characteristic of dance.

A few early Bka' gdams pa commentators from the eleventh and early thirteenth centuries further specify how much body movement is sufficient to qualify as song and dance. In his commentary on the gradual training of novices, Phywa pa specifies that the transgression against song occurs the moment one moves one's throat and (sings) "one stanza of verse (*tshigs su bcad pa cig*)." ¹¹ The twelfth century scholar 'Dar Tshul khrim rgyal po,¹² Sbal ti Brtson 'grus dbang phyugs (1129-1215),¹³ and the anonymous author of Text K6 similarly emphasize the mere utterance of one śloka of verse in their respective commentaries on ŚĀ.¹⁴ The last two authors also define the momentary completion of a dance movement (*bro gar gyi le'u 1*) as the consummation of transgression. The Vinaya master from Bya further specifies in his commentary on ĀBH that this dance movement constitutes the movement of one's eyebrow (*smin ma bskyod pa*). Phywa pa also makes this same claim in his commentary on the gradual training of novices, writing "Knowledge of the body establishes the defining characteristics of dance (*lus kyi rig byed bro gar gyi mtshan nyid du grub pa*)." ¹⁵ The twelfth century Tibetan scholar Rog Chos kyi

¹⁰ K1: 157-158. Note that song is spelled as *klu*.

¹¹ K2b: 584:585.

¹² K4: 77-78.

¹³ K3b: 105-106.

¹⁴ K6: 384.

¹⁵ K2b: 584-585.

dbang phyug, on the other hand, describes “the movement of the body (*gzugs bsgyur*)” as the defining characteristic of dance.¹⁶

The emphasis on what motivates one to sing and dance in Śākyaprabha's ŚĀ also found strong resonance among Tibetan commentators in the early and later periods. In addition to bodily movement, some of the later Tibetan commentators also list wild mind (*rgod bag*), attachment (*chags pa*), and thought of attachment (*chags sems*) as sources of motivation defining such bodily movements as dance. References to these terms are found in Rgyal tshabs's notes of Tsong kha pa's lecture on novice precepts given at Gnam rtse lding,¹⁷ a commentary by Tshe mchog gling yongs 'dzin Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713-1793) on ĀBH,¹⁸ as well as in the respective works on the novice precepts by Gu ge yongs 'dzin,¹⁹ Glag bla,²⁰ and Brag dkar.²¹

What distinguishes the early Bka' gdams pa commentators from the later Tibetan authors is the theorization of the importance of motivation as a crucial indicator, in a four-fold adjudicating scheme that I will discuss in detail shortly. In this four-fold scheme, a reported or confessed transgression is examined in four respects: the basis of the transgression, the doer's intention, the means employed to perform the transgression, and the result of the transgression. The commentaries of the early Bka' gdams pa commentators discuss each of these four respects of transgression concerning song, dance, and instrumental music. As illustrated in Column 4 of Appendix 2, in considering the intention of the offender against this rule, all of the Bka' gdams pa commentators (K1, K2a and K2b, K3a, K4, K5, and K6) list arousal of thought (*kun slong*), self-entertainment (*rang dga'*), and wild mind (*rgyod bag*) as common intentions behind singing, dancing, or playing instrumental music.

¹⁶ K5: 175-176.

¹⁷ T1: 591. This lecture was recorded in Tsong kha pa's biography. See 'Brug rgyal dbang chos rje Blo bzang 'phrin las rnam rgyal (? : 426).

¹⁸ T3a: 234.

¹⁹ T4:39-40.

²⁰ T6:636.

²¹ T8:13.

Introducing the Rule

In Buddhist canon law, the necessity of prohibiting fully ordained Buddhist monks and nuns from performing, teaching, or watching song, dance, or instrumental music is most commonly explained using cases that illustrate the consequences of not observing the prohibition. In Buddhist canon law of the Mahāsāṃghika, Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravāda, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Dharmaguptaka traditions, as well as in the Pāli Vinaya, such a prohibition is introduced with legal cases concerning monks and nuns in a band of six (Skt. *ṣaḍvārgika*; Tib. *drug sde*; Ch. *liùqún* 六群).²²

The event that led to the promulgation of this regulation against music for fully ordained monks and nuns is presented in three versions. In the first version, which is recorded in Buddhist canon law of the Sarvāstivāda and the Dharmaguptaka traditions, as well as the Pāli Vinaya,²³ the monks and nuns simply went to watch songs, dance, and instrumental music. In the second version, recorded in Buddhist canon law of the Mahāsāṃghika and Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravāda,²⁴ they went to watch and diverted the audience's attention away from the performers through their exaggerated behavior, thus ruining the performance. In the third version recorded in Buddhist canon law of the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition,²⁵ they put on lay costumes and performed to compete against some musicians from the south to avenge them for insulting the monks in an earlier performance. These stories of monks and nuns in bands of six are used to demonstrate why the prohibition against monks and nuns performing song, dance, or instrumental music was established.

One invention in the literary tradition on the novice precepts is the adoption of these stories to demonstrate the necessity of establishing this rule for novice monks and nuns. Column 1 in Appendix 2 summarizes the occurrences of this introductory story in the Indic and Tibetan texts on novice precepts. This summary shows that this

²² For a discussion of the role of monks and nuns in the band of six in the Buddhist canon law, see Liu 2013.

²³ See *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* (T1435: 269b27-269c6; 342a11-342a27); *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (T1428: 662b8-662c24); and *Pāli Vinaya*, Oldenberg 1880: vol.2, 107-108 in original and Horner 1963, vol.5, 145 in translation.

²⁴ See Roth 1970: 274-275, Nolot 1991: 299-300; *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* (T1425: 494a8-494a24; 540b20-540c8).

²⁵ See 'Dul ba rnam par 'byed pa, in *Bka' 'gyur*, Dpe bsdur ma (Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008), *Ja*, vol.7, 534-558; *Dge slong ma'i 'dul ba rnam par 'byed pa*, in *Bka' 'gyur*, Dpe bsdur ma, (Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008), *Ta*, vol.9, 577-579; *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (T1442: 842c26-845a23); *Mūlasarvāstivāda Bhikṣuṇīvinaya* (T1443: 987c29-988b1); *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayasamgraha* (T1458: 593a4-593b12).

case story was used to introduce the prohibition in Kamalaśīla's commentary on NĀ but was absent in the other Indic texts. In this commentary, Kamalaśīla begins his explanation of the rule against music with an introductory story (*gleng gzhi*) in which the monks in the band of six sung, danced, and played musical instruments to avenge some southern musicians at a festival celebrating the erection of two temples for two serpent kings.²⁶

This summary in Appendix 2 also illustrates the growing popularity of these introductory stories among the early Bka' gdams pa commentators. All of the Bka' gdams pa authors except the Bya Vinaya master cite these stories of the band of six to argue for the need to establish the rule against music. This exception is understandable, as the Bya Vinaya master's work is a commentary on ĀBH, which also lacks the introductory story concerning the band of six. The case story of the band of six seems to have declined in popularity among later Tibetan commentators from the fourteenth century onward, appearing only sporadically in the commentary of 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912) on NĀ.²⁷

The failure to observe the prohibition against song, dance, and instrumental music has dire and irreversible consequences in certain cases. One widely cited case concerns monks and nuns who were criticized by lay people for having watched a musical performance. In another such case recorded in the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* (T1421: 97b16-96b17), some Buddhist nuns who went to watch musical performances became attached to such entertainment, lost interest in Buddhist practices, and eventually left the monastic community to join the non-Buddhists.

However, these introductory stories did not explicitly explain the reasons why and how involvement in, or consumption of, song, dance, or instrumental music performances could jeopardize spiritual practice. The Indic compositions on novice rules attributed to Nāgārjuna and Śākyaprabha contain the earliest discussion of this. In a commentary on NĀ, Nāgārjuna explains why song, dance, instrumental music, garlands, and luxurious beds are prohibited in regulations for novices: "The performances such as singing and dancing will arouse one's arrogance. One who has abandoned arrogance is

²⁶ The fullest version of this story appears in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*. For a summary of this story, see Liu 2014: 68-70.

²⁷ The last few pages of 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho's work identifies it as a commentary on NĀ attributed to Nāgārjuna. For different editions of this text, see 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho 1999a; 1999b; and 2007. For an English translation of this text by Glenn Mullin and Lobsang Rapgya, see 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho 1978; 1997. For a Chinese translation of this text, see 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho 2006.

called a vow-holder.”²⁸ In his commentary on NĀ, Kamalaśīla explains this prohibition for vow-holders, writing “Why? It is because they [song, dance, and instrumental music] will cause self-aggrandizement (*rgyags*) and arrogance (*dregs pa*), and secondarily, they will keep one in a cyclic existence.”²⁹

This notion of attachment to a cyclic existence in this world is elaborated further in the literary tradition of novice regulations centered on the works of Śākyaprabha. In both ŚĀ and its auto-commentary ĀBH, Śākyaprabha explains that the prohibition was introduced because “they [the things prohibited] are the source of attachment to this world” (*‘di ‘dir ‘khor ba la chags rgyu yin no*).³⁰ Commenting on Śākyaprabha’s explanation, Vinītadeva writes,

*ci ‘di rgyu gang gis mi bya ba yin zhe na | ‘di dag ‘khor bar
chags par byed pa’i rgyu zhes bya ba smos te | ‘khor ba la
chags pa ni ‘khor bar chags pa ste | kun nas zhen pa zhes bya
ba’i don to || gar la sogs pa byed pa ‘di ni ‘dir rgyu ste byed
pa’i rgyu zhes bya ba’i don to || gang gi phyir gar la sogs pa
la rab tu dga’ ba ni skyo bar mi ‘gyur ba de’i phyir mngon par
dga’ ba ni ‘khor ba’i rgyu yin no ||*³¹

What does “this is the cause and nobody should do it” mean? It means that these are the causes of attachment to cyclic existence. “Attaching to the cyclic existence” means, attaching to the cyclic existence, which means completely attached. Performance of dance and so forth is the cause [of attachment to cyclic existence] in this world, which means it is the cause of the act [of attachment]. Why? Since dance and so forth cause one to become extremely happy, but not become sad, for this reason, genuine happiness is the cause of cyclic existence.

According to Vinītadeva, the performance or consumption of song, dance, and instrumental music can bring happiness and dispel sorrow. For this reason, one who watches such musical performances would be content with worldly life and fail to see the peril of attachment to cyclic existence.

Discerning one’s intention to sing, dance, or play instrumental music is of primary importance. As mentioned above, Vinītadeva

²⁸ L1: 729.

²⁹ L4: 781-782.

³⁰ S1a: 184-185; and S1b: 359-361.

³¹ S2: 625-627.

analyzes song and dance as physical movements caused by “wild mind” (*rgod bag*). In later eleventh and thirteenth century Bka' gdams pa commentaries, “wild mind” became one of the most salient terms in discussions of motivations that would consummate the violation of this regulation. In these works, the Tibetan authors discuss the performer's intention from two perspectives: consciousness (*'du shes*) and arousal of thought (*kun slong*). In particular, the Bya Vinaya master maintains that if someone who is not mentally ill sings, dances, and plays instrumental music, it is a transgression.³² The reason, he writes, is as follows,

*'di gsum gi dgag bya ni rgyud ma zhi zhing rgod bag gi rnam
par 'phel pas 'khor ba la chags shing zhen pa'i rgyu la | de'i
dbang gis 'khor ba'i gnyen po sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa rgyud
la brten pa'i bsam pa mi 'gyur ba yin no//³³*

Concerning the ways to prevent these three things: as [these three are] the cause of clinging and attachment to cyclic existence due to the development of un-pacified mental stream and wild mind. By the power of those [three things], one would not develop the thought to rely on the stream of the Buddha's teachings, the remedy for cyclic existence.

According to the Bya Vinaya master, the major threat is that people who indulge in musical entertainment are less likely to devote themselves to learning and practicing Buddha's teachings to transcend cyclic existence. All other commentaries from this period express similar meanings. Phywa pa concurs with this interpretation, writing:

*'o na gsum po de bya mi rung pa ci'i phyir zhe na | 'di 'dir
zhes te | sa steng 'dir ram | gsum po 'di byar mi rung pa'i
skabs 'dir ro || des myang ngan las 'das pa ma'dod pa'i bsam
pa mi 'gyur pa'o ||³⁴*

However, why is it not appropriate to do these three things? “This here” means in this world or the time when it is not appropriate to do these three things. That would cause one not to want to transcend from suffering.

³² Conversely, if one participates in such activity while mentally ill, it is not deemed a transgression.

³³ K1: 158.

³⁴ K2a: 465.

Among the later Tibetan commentators, Gzhan phan Chos kyi gnang ba (1871-1927) also views thoughts of distraction as the cause of being trapped in cyclic existence.³⁵

In sum, these Indic and Tibetan commentaries maintain that if one indulges in performing or consuming this triad of song, dance, and instrumental music, one would lose interest in pursuing transcendence from cyclic existence. This is because sensual happiness brought by such entertainments conceals the suffering that results from cyclic existence and thus deceives one into continuing in the illusory happiness of dwelling in this world.

Exception

With the exception of NĀ, all of the Indic and Tibetan writings on novice regulations make some accommodation for exceptional circumstances among those exposed to music to remain transgression-free. Given that the NĀ only enumerates the ten precepts for novice monks and nuns, the lack of the mention of such exceptions does not indicate opposition to accommodating exceptional circumstances. The fact that all the three commentaries on NĀ propose accommodating exceptions indicates that discussion of these exceptions may have been omitted for brevity.

The accommodation of these exceptions in various Indic and Tibetan texts is summarized in Column 2 in Appendix 2. This summary reveals that authors of these Indian and Tibetan commentators contend that novice monks and nuns commit no offence when using music in verbal activities on some or all of the following three occasions: praising the Buddha (*ston pa la mchod pa*), preaching the Dharma (*chos 'chad pa*), and performing the Tripartite Tridaṇḍaka ritual (*rgyun chags gsum pa*).³⁶ Commenting on NĀ, Kamalaśīla writes that there is no offence when one blends melodies and songs to praise the grand quality of the Triple Jewels.³⁷ To this, Kalyāṇamitra adds one more exceptional occasion and writes that there is also no offence when one "sounds melodies" (*dbyangs kyis 'don par byed pa*) when one does so to praise the Buddha for worshipping or to perform the Tridaṇḍaka ritual.³⁸ The last anonymous author of Text L2, who also comments

³⁵ T9a: 195-196.

³⁶ For a discussion on a manual from the Dunhuang cave library on how to perform the Tripartite Tridaṇḍaka ritual, see an analysis of IOL Tib J 466 in Dalton 2016: 206-208.

³⁷ L4: 781-782.

³⁸ L3: 862-863.

on NĀ, warned that one should not perform [music] even in the presence of the Triple Jewels if it is performed not to worship the Triple Jewels but to entertain oneself.³⁹ Shortly afterward, the author further commented that on three slightly different occasions the use of music would be free of transgression: when preaching the Dharma (*chos 'chad pa*), reading books (*yi ge klog pa*), or praising the Triple Jewels (*dkon mchog gsum la bstod pa*). Thus, according to these Indian authors, a novice Buddhist monk or nun may have the option to apply melody in verbal activities when praising the Buddha or the Triple Jewels, performing the Tridaṇḍaka Ritual, preaching the Dharma, or reading books.

The early Tibetan commentators have also accorded with their Indian predecessors to accommodate the use of music in these exceptional situations. Instead of affirming novice monks and nuns when music could be used without infringing a violation, the Tibetan commentators preferred to present these occasions as cautions. The Bya Vinaya master writes that singing (*klu len pa*) will only constitute an offence when it is not done to preach the Dharma, praise the virtues of the Buddha, or perform the *Tridaṇḍaka* ritual. With the exception of Text K6 where the author did not mention occasions when the use of music will be excused, this rhetorical strategy is evidenced in all of the early Bka' gdams pa commentaries.

The later Tibetan commentators are less enthusiastic in discussing exceptions. Tshe mchog gling yongs 'dzin (T3b) and 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho (T5) did not discuss any circumstances that would excuse the use of music. Rgyal tshabs (T1), Gu ge yongs 'dzin (T4), Glag bla (T6), and Brag dkar (T8) only consider the use of music excusable when it is performed to worship the Buddha or the Triple Jewels. Rong tha chung tsang Blo bzang dam chos rgya mtsho (1865-1917), on the other hand, considers instrumental music played to worship the divine (*lha mchod pa*) to be excusable (T7). Gzhan phan (T9) increases the circumstantial exceptions to include two occasions: when one praises the virtue of the Buddha or when preaching the Dharma (*chos sgrogs par byed pa*). Only Zhwa dmar is willing to consider the use a melody (*dbyangs su 66y aba*) in verbal activities free of offence when one does so to praise the virtue of the Buddha, recite Buddhist texts (*mdo 'don pa*) or perform the Tripartite Tridaṇḍaka ritual (T2).

Buddhist canon law addresses two of these three exceptions in rules for fully ordained monks and nuns. These exceptional situations allow the use of musical melody to praise the Buddha's virtues

³⁹ L2: 832.

or to perform the Tridaṇḍaka ritual.⁴⁰ What remains puzzling in these Indic and Tibetan commentaries is the accommodation of the third occasion that allows novice monks and nuns to use music when preaching the Dharma. This puzzling discussion appears in both the anonymous author's commentary on NĀ in L2 and in the commentary of Gzhan phan (T9). Fully ordained Buddhist monks and nuns are prohibited from using music to preach dharma or to recite the Prātimokṣa, an enumeration of verified disciplinary rules for fully ordained monks and nuns.⁴¹ These prohibitions are discussed explicitly in the *Dharamaguptaka Vinaya* (T1428: 817a14-817b1), the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* (T1421: 121c3-121c4), and the *Pinimu jing* (T1463: 833-a21-833a26). Fully ordained monks and nuns exclusively participate in the recitation of the Prātimokṣa as a regular ritual. Novice monks and nuns are not qualified to attend those recitation rituals. Yet the anonymous author's commentary on NĀ in Text L2 states that a novice monk or nun will not commit a transgression when using music to preach the Dharma (*chos 'chad pa*). For Gzhan phan, music should be permitted when reciting canonical Buddhist scriptures (*mdo 'don pa*). The fact that only two of the Indic and Tibetan authors mention this exception indicates perhaps that other commentators are against permitting the use of music to preach the Dharma.

The Validating Ritual

To prevent abusing exceptions that would provide Buddhist novice monks and nuns flexibility to occasionally use music for legitimate purposes for the sake of enhancing their religious practices, a proper ritual must be performed prior to the commencement of the musical performance in order to avoid committing a transgression. In this ritual, the performer is asked to proclaim the nature and the purpose of the subsequent musical performance.

Commentaries on both NĀ and ŚĀ contain detailed instructions on how to perform this ritual. In his commentary on NĀ, Kamalaśīla writes that one should not proclaim that "For the sake of worshiping, let me sing and dance." Instead, one should say, "In the same way the lord of the gods and demi-gods worships, let me worship the dust at the foot of the Buddha."⁴² Afterward, one can sing or dance to worship without committing a transgression. ŚĀ, its auto-

⁴⁰ For a discussion of these exceptional rules for fully ordained monks and nuns, see chapter six on "Reciting and Chanting in Buddhism" in Liu 2014: 151-205.

⁴¹ For discussion on these prohibitions, see Liu 2014: 175-182.

⁴² L4: 781-782.

commentary ĀBH, and Vinītadeva's commentary on ŚĀ also contain explanations of this ritual. Śākyaprabha writes in ŚĀ,

*mchod pa'i ched du'ang rol mo'i sgra dang ni | glu byos zhes ni mi
brjod 'on kyang ni | lha dang lha min dbang pos zhabs rdul gtugs | |
sangs rgyas la ni mchod par byos zhes brjod | |*⁴³

Even for the sake of worshipping, do not say, “let me sound music and sing song.” Instead, say, “The lord of the gods and demi-gods touched the dust at the foot [of the Buddha?]. Let me worship the Buddha [likewise].”

Śākyaprabha further elaborates on this passage in ĀBH, writing:

*cher na ston pa la mchod pa'i phyir yang brtul zhugs can gyis bro gar
dang | glu dang | rol mo'i sgra byos shig ces brjod par mi bya'o | |
'o na ci lta zhe na | lha dang lha ma yin rnams kyis zhabs kyi rdul la
gtugs pa'i bcom ldan 'das la mchod pa byos shig ces brjod par bya'o
| | 'dir gzhung ni | bzhin bzangs dag bcos ldan 'das la rang gi bzos
mchod pa byos shig ces 'byung ba yin no | | dmigs kyis bsal ba ni |
chos sgrogs byed pa'i glu ni nyes pa med | |*⁴⁴

Even for the sake of worshipping the Teacher, a vow-holder should not say, “Let us sing, dance, and play musical instruments.” Instead, how should it be done? Say, “Let us worship the Buddha, the dust at whose feet were touched by the Lord of the gods and demi-gods.” This is because the phrase “Let us worship the lord whose countenance is excellent and pure” appears in the root text. The exception [is]: there is no wrong in songs articulating the doctrine.

The key point in adding this ritual is to ensure that performers correctly articulate the purpose of musical performance as a form of worshipping the Buddha. Different wordings could change the legitimacy of the same performance, even for a performer with the same intention. However, none of the early Bka' gdams pa commentaries contain any discussion of this ritual. Yet, similar instructions are found in the later Tibetan commentaries. Rgyal tshabs writes that there is no transgression if, for the sake of worshipping the Buddha, one says the following before singing or dancing: “Oh! Let me wor-

⁴³ S1a: 184-185.

⁴⁴ S1b: 359-361.

ship the Buddha!”⁴⁵ Failure to properly proclaim the nature of one’s performance would result in a transgression. On this possibility, Bragdkar writes that, even for the sake of worship, a transgression would occur if one said “let me sing and dance,” but not “Let me worship the Buddha.”⁴⁶

A Mandatory Skill

Buddhist canon law of extant traditions also requires those who are unable to use music on those occasions to practice their musical skills in a solitary place. The introductory story of this requirement appears in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayakṣudrakavastu* (T1451: 223b22-223b29), where a young monk did not know how to make his praise of the Buddha or the performance of the Tridaṇḍaka ritual more musically pleasing. When this was reported to the Buddha, he told the young monk to practice his musical skills. Therefore, monks began to practice in their living quarters as well as in the assembly halls in the monastery. When the elderly Anāthapiṇḍada came to visit, he found it unbearable when he saw and heard monks practicing their musical skills everywhere, and complained to the Buddha. Hence, the Buddha told monks to practice their musical skills in solitary places (Ch. *pingchu* 屏處; Tib. *dben pa*), not in public space.

Kamalaśīla discusses the importance of using music on these occasions in his commentary on NĀ, noting:

*yang na gngang bas sem can gzhan rnams dad pa bskyed pa'i phyir |
dkon mchog gsum gyi che ba'i yon tan bstod ra rnams dbyangs dang
glu bsres te byas na nyes pa med do | |*⁴⁷

However, the performance [of song] intended to cultivate faith in other sentient beings, which is the praise of the great virtues of the Triple Jewels intonated with a combination of melody (*dbyangs*) and song, is without fault.

Occurrences of this requirement in the Indic and Tibetan texts obliging ordained Buddhists to hone their musical skills in solitary places are summarized in Column 3 in Appendix 2. This summary reveals that, except for the NĀ, all of the Indic texts on novice regulations discuss this requirement and urge novices who are unable to use mu-

⁴⁵ T1: 591.

⁴⁶ T8: 13.

⁴⁷ L4: 781-782.

sic properly on those two occasions to practice their musical skills in a solitary place. Kamalaśīla writes in his commentary on NĀ, "If one doesn't know songs (*glu dbyangs*) but wants to learn, he should be led by those who know [how to sing] and practice in a solitary place".⁴⁸

Śākyaprabha expresses a similar sentiment in ŚĀ, where he writes, "If one does not know songs for the sake of the noble doctrine, one should go to a solitary place and learn them well."⁴⁹ He further explains this line in ĀBH, "Any vow-holder (*brtul zhugs can*) who does not know songs (*glu*) should go to a solitary place. For the sole sake of articulating the noble dharma, [the vow-holder] should learn songs well."⁵⁰ In his commentary on ŚĀ, Vinītadeva comments on this passage by Śākyaprabha, writing:

*dbyangs mi shes pa ni dbyangs la mi mkhas pa'i dge tshul dben
par zhugs te bslab par bya'o | | ci'i rgyu mtshan gyis zhe na |
dam pa'i chos kyi phyir zhes smras pa yin no | | ni'i sgra ni 'dir
yang dbyangs la hi mkhas na zhes snga ma las khyad par du byed
pa'i don to | | nyid ni don gzhan rnam par gcod pa'o | | dben par
zhugs te zhes smos pa ni bag med par rnam par sbang ba'i pyhir ro
| | bslab par bya zhes bya ba ni 'di bslab par gzhan ni ma yin gyi
| gal te dam pa'i chos la bstod pas nye bar mchod pa'i phyir bslab
pa la nyes pa yod pa ma yin no zhes bya ba de lta bu'i tshig de dag
ni mchog tu zhes bya bar shes par bya'o | |⁵¹*

"Do not know melody" means that novices who are not good at melodies should stay in a solitary place and learn. Why? It is for the sake of the noble dharma. The syllable *ni* distinguishes "those who are not learned in melodies" from the former situation. "Self" excludes others. The reason to stay in a solitary place is to renounce recklessness completely. "Should learn" means this is not the basis of the learning; it should be understood as "there is no harm in learning if it is intended to thoroughly worship the noble dharma".

Among the Tibetan commentators, Tshe mchog gling yongs 'dzin elaborates on this in his commentary on ĀBH, where he writes,

*dam chos ched du glu ni mi shes na | dben par song ste rab tu
bslab par bya | zhes gsung dkon mchog mchod pa'i ched min*

⁴⁸ L4: 781-782.

⁴⁹ S1a: 184-185.

⁵⁰ S1b: 359-361.

⁵¹ S2: 625-627.

*par rang dgar glu gar sogs byed pa ni nyes dmigs che ste | de
dag gang byed kyang rgod bag dang chags pa'i sems kyis byed
pa shas che la | 'dod chags ni 'khor bar 'ching byed kyi gtso bo
yin pa dang | 'dul ba'i bslab khrims rnams ni 'khor bar 'ching
byed 'dod chags sreng pa 'gog ba gtso bor mdzad pa yin pas |
rang nyid bslab khrims las g.yel zhing skye bo gzhan dag kyang
g.yengs nas nges 'byung dang skyo shas ma skyes pa mi skye |
skyes pa rnams kyang nyams pa'i rkyen du che lo |⁵²*

“For the sake of the noble doctrine, if one does not know song, one should go learn it well in a solitary place,” meaning, if it is not for the sake of worshiping the Triple Jewels, it is a heavy transgression if one performs song, dance, and so forth. Whoever performs it mostly with wild minds, and attachments and desires are the principal cause of cyclic existence. Because disciplinary regulations are the principal means to cease [and] burn attachments tied to cyclic existence, having neglected the disciplinary regulations, oneself and others whose minds were wild would not have the thought for renunciation or suffering [of cyclic existence]. Even those who have generated such thoughts will likely degenerate.

Among the later commentators, only Zhwa dmar briefly mentioned this requirement in his commentary on the disciplinary rules for novices. At the end of his comment on this rule on song, dance, and instrumental music, Zhwa dmar maintained that one should “use melody (*dbyangs su bya ba*)” when praising the Buddha’s virtues, and “adopt a musical voice (*dbyangs kyi ro bya bar gnangs ba*)” when reciting canonical Buddhist scriptures (*mdo 'don pa*) or performing the Tridaṇḍaka ritual. And those who do not know how to do so must learn and practice it in a solitary place.⁵³

⁵² T3b: 235-236.

⁵³ T2: 888.

The Four-fold Adjudicating Scheme

In Buddhist canon law, reported transgressions are investigated from four different perspectives. In the case of a violation of the rule against killing a human being, the guilt or innocence of a suspect depends on the following four key factors. Was the victim a human being? Was the killing intentional? Did the suspect try to enact the killing? And did the victim die? All four of these conditions need to be met for a transgression that, in theory, would call for the expulsion of the suspect from the monastic community. Otherwise, the suspect would either be found innocent or would be given a lighter punishment.

This four-fold scheme of investigation is widely discussed in the Buddhist canon law of all extant traditions in South and East Asia. An early occurrence of the four terms used to theorize this scheme is also found in the Tibetan translation of the Indic Vinaya commentaries preserved in the Tibetan Buddhist canon. One such source is *Prātimokṣasūtraṭīkavīnayasamuccaya*, a commentary on versified monastic regulations for fully ordained Buddhist monks, attributed to the eighth century Indian scholar Vimalamitra.⁵⁴ In the Tibetan translation of this text, four terms are given: basis (*gzhi*), intention (*bsam pa*), effort (*sbyor ba*), and result (*mtshar thug*).⁵⁵

In Indic texts, these four terms are used mainly to elaborate on regulations for fully ordained monks and nuns; but they were not used in any of the Indic commentaries on novice regulations. Yet they were used innovatively by Vinaya scholars in Tibet to elaborate on novice regulations between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Column 4 in Appendix 2 summarizes the occurrences of this four-fold adjudicating scheme in all the Indic and Tibetan commentaries on novice regulations. This shows that the Tibetans first used five terms, and later four terms, for this scheme. The innovation began with the eleventh century Bya Vinaya master who introduced the following five terms in his commentary: basis (*gzhi*), consciousness (*'du shes*), arousal of thought (*kun slong*), effort (*sbyor ba*), and result

⁵⁴ See Vimalamitra. *So sor thar pa'i mdo rgya cher 'grel pa 'dul ba kun las btus pa*, in Bstan 'gyur, Dpe bsdur ma (Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008), *Pu*, vol.85, 3-828. This text was translated by Jinamitra, Sarvajñadeva, and Klu'i rgyal mtshan. The Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1980:64) wrote in *Bod kyi deb ther dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs* that Vimalamitra came to Tibet by royal invitation from the Tibetan king Khri srong lde btsan. For a recent English introduction on Vimalamitra, see Gruber 2013.

⁵⁵ Thānissaro characterizes a transgression as having five factors in the *Pali Vinaya*: the *effort*, the *perception* under which it is made, the *intention* motivating it, the *object* at which it is aimed, and the *result*. See Thānissaro 2007: 7; 27.

(*mthar thug*).⁵⁶ These five terms also appear in Phywa pa's commentary. Phywa pa, a student of the Bya Vinaya master, used the same set of five terms in a commentary illustrating the gradual training of the Buddhist novices (K2b). Yet in his commentary on ŚĀ, Phywa pa consolidated "consciousness" and "motivation" into one term: intention (*bsam pa*).⁵⁷

The new set of four terms was then used consistently in all of the other works by Sbal ti, 'Dar Tshul khrims rgyal po, and the anonymous work Text T6. The following commentary on singing by 'Dar Tshul khrims rgyal po clearly demonstrates how the four terms were used in these Tibetan commentaries to analyze different aspects of transgression in the rule concerning music. He writes,

*yan lag la gzhi bsams sbyor ba mthar thug pa'o || gzhi la 2
gang blang par bya ba'i don dang | len yang byed pa bdag nyid
do || don la 2 'grin gyur glu'i rgyal mtshan nyid du grub pa
dang | tshad shu lo ka 1 longs pa'o || bdag nyid 3 ston pa'i
yon tan yang dag par bsgrags pa'I dus ma yin pa dang | rgyun
bshesgs 3 pa 'don pa'i dus ma yin pa dang | de dag slob pa'i
dus ma yin pa'o || bsam pa la 'dus shes ma 'khrul | kun slong
rgod bag gi bsam pas glu len par 'dod pa | sbyor ba dag nyid
dam gzhan tha snyad dang ldan pa la skos pas len par zhugs pa
| mthar thug shu lo ka 1 gi tshad du longs pa yongs su rdzogs
pa'o ||*⁵⁸

The secondary aspects include basis, intention, effort, and result. Basis has two aspects: what is sung and the condition of the singing. What is sung refers to moving the throat, which completes the defining characteristic of song, and the singing of one stanza. The condition [of singing] has three aspects: 1) when it is not the time to articulate the pure virtues of the Teacher; 2) when it is not the time to recite during the third event of the day; and 3) when it is not the time to learn these things. Intention: one who is not mentally disturbed desires to sing due to recklessness. Effort: One sings or causes others to sing by preparing the condition. Result: the singing of one stanza completes the result.

⁵⁶ K1: 158.

⁵⁷ K2a: 465.

⁵⁸ K4: 78.

The above analysis of the application of the terms of the four-fold scheme in Indic and Tibetan texts on novice regulations shows that Tibetan writers in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries innovatively borrowed these four terms to elaborate on novice regulations. Yet in later Tibetan commentaries on novice regulations from the fourteenth century onward, these four terms seem to have lost popularity. Column 4 in Appendix One shows that none of the later Tibetan commentators discussed this four-fold adjudicating scheme in their commentaries.

Tantric Buddhism's Impact on Music Practices in Tibet

The aim of this article is to understand how the involvement of ordained Buddhist monks in the performance and consumption of song, dance, and instrumental music came to be accepted in Tibetan society. The above investigation of the novice rule on musical performance shows that such acceptance was clearly not fostered by radical reinterpretation of doctrine, given that the Tibetan commentators by and large concurred with the interpretation of their Indian predecessors on those regulations as presented in the translated literature. Indeed, the Tibetans even agreed with ŚĀ and ĀBH that an additional ritual must be performed properly to justify the subsequent musical performance used to praise the Buddha's virtues or to perform the Tridaṇḍaka ritual. Hence, to understand the practice of music in Tibetan Buddhism, we must probe beyond Buddhist canon law to trace the historical, religious, and social causes that led to Tibetan society's acceptance of Buddhists being involved in various forms of musical activities.

Historically, a tradition of composing and performing poems of spiritual realization was established in Tibet no later than the eleventh century. The late eighteenth century Amdo yogin and song writer Zhabs dkar ba Tshogs drug rang grol (1781-1851) traced the origin of this tradition to the eighty-four accomplished Indian siddha adepts who composed countless numbers of such poems in order to discipline sentient beings.⁵⁹ According to Zhabs dkar ba, this tradition flourished in medieval Tibet from the early to later period of Buddhist dissemination without interruption.⁶⁰ Zhabs dkar ba also discussed when and how to perform songs of spiritualization. Accord-

⁵⁹ Zhabs dkar ba Tshogs drug rang grol 1987: vol.1, 4-5. In this song, Zhabs dkar ba used vajra songs (*rdo rje'i mgur*), songs of spiritual realization (*mgur*), and *doha* songs interchangeably. Schaeffer 2005: 3-4 has also quoted this passage on varja songs.

⁶⁰ See Zhabs dkar ba Tshogs drug rang grol 1987: vol.1, 4-5.

ing to him, a yogin should sing songs (*glu dbyangs len*) in order to arouse people's interest in Buddhist doctrine when many people are assembled on the following occasions: when an empowerment *maṇḍala* is completed, when distinguishing cyclic existence from transcendence, when walking to the graveyard, or when coming from the island garden of pleasure.⁶¹ The use of music on each of these occasions must comply with certain regulations on wearing costumes and ornaments, holding instruments, and bodily movement. If someone is unable to compose songs spontaneously, he should sing songs composed by previous saints. Zhabs dkar ba further argued that the merits of singing on such occasions are enormous. In particular, singing songs of spiritual realization could please the Buddha and the yoginīs, attract the virtuous deities to come assemble like clouds, arouse faith in the audience, and direct the sentient beings to the Buddha's teachings.⁶²

Today, the Tibetan literary corpus still preserves numerous such poems composed by Tibetan yogins, monks, or lay writers. These poems have come down to us through textual and/or oral transmission. This is the historical background in which ordained Buddhist monks such as the abbot Shar Skal ldan rgya mtsho and the Fifth Dalai Lama wrote songs of spiritual realization and entertained guests with vocal and instrumental music.

The complex social and religious context of medieval Tibet also had a major influence on the treatment of music in Tibetan Buddhist practices. On one hand, medieval Tibetans earnestly sought to revitalize the practice of Buddhism in Tibet by advocating the strict observance of Vinaya rules. However, with the persecution of Buddhism in the ninth century, Buddhist activities were reduced to near extinction: in central Tibet, monasteries were destroyed, their residents either exiled or forced to disrobe, and monastic ordinations were brought to an end. This persecution continued and was witnessed by Tibetans into the fourteenth century. One such witness, Bu ston, made the criticism that even ordained monks who stayed in monasteries merely wore religious robes and only observed the four root vows for three months during summer retreats; in other seasons of the year, they disregarded even the four root vows.⁶³ The nineteenth century author 'Brug rgyal dbang chos rje Blo bzang 'phrin las rnam rgyal captured the lamentation over the decline of Buddhist monasticism in his biography of Tsong kha pa. The author criticized the tantric practitioners who were formally ordained to wear monas-

⁶¹ Zhabs dkar ba Tsogs drug rang grol 1987: vol.1, 8.

⁶² Zhabs dkar ba Tshogs drug rang grol 1987: vol.1, 11.

⁶³ See Bu ston 2000: 878-879. For Chinese translation, see Bu ston 1988: part 1, 265.

tic robes but engaged in sexual and other behaviors inappropriate for ordained Buddhists. With expressions of outrage, the author accused these tantric practitioners of disgracing the Buddhist community. He wrote,

*la la ni gsang sngags pa yin zhes sha chang dang | bud med la byung
rgyal du spyad de bu dang bu mos mtha' brten cing | glu bro gzhas
sogs khyims pa dang gnyis su ma mchims pas sngar dus kyi sbyor
sgrol du grags pa'i bstan pa slar yang spel ba dang |*⁶⁴

Some claimed to be tantric practitioners. They indulged in alcohol and women, and were bound by son and daughter. They enjoyed song and dance, and behaved in a manner that was not different from lay people. For this reason, the practice formerly known as liberating through sex (*sbyor sgrol*) began to spread again.

Indeed, according to this author, during one summer retreat at Gnamts rtse ldeng monastery, Tsong kha pa purposefully taught Vinaya in order to restore purity in the teaching and practicing of Vinaya in Tibet.⁶⁵

There were efforts to purify Buddhist monastic practice in medieval Tibet by advocating strict observance of monastic regulations, including abstinence from song, dance, and instrumental music. However, the arrival of tantric Buddhism, in which music was indispensable to ritual liturgies, seriously challenged these efforts. Tantric Buddhism grew on Indian soil and arrived in Tibet as early as the early dissemination period, but it only began to flourish in Tibet during the later dissemination period beginning in the tenth century.⁶⁶

A unique feature of the Tantric tradition is the indispensability of music in tantric rituals and the enormous merit of music offerings in these rituals. Here, I will briefly discuss the role of music in one tantric text, the *Hevajra Tantra*,⁶⁷ which describes tantric rituals, focusing

⁶⁴ 'Brug rgyal dbang chos rje Blo bzang 'phrin las rnam rgyal (? : 458).

⁶⁵ 'Brug rgyal dbang chos rje Blo bzang 'phrin las rnam rgyal (? : 426).

⁶⁶ Davidson 2005:121 remarks that the older form of tantric practice maintained by individuals who had transgressed the vow structure of the esoteric dispensation had functioned as a source of monastic corruption. In order to "bring back to Tibet the pure esoteric dispensation" and to "resurrect the temples and monasteries with Indian consultants, not just Tibetans from the northeast," young Tibetans were sent to study authentic esoteric Buddhism in India.

⁶⁷ The major extant commentary on *Hevajra Tantra* is the Sanskrit text *Yogaratanmālā* by a certain Kāṇha. The *Hevajra Tantra* was translated into both Tibetan and Chinese. For critical study on the *Hevajra Tantra*, as well as its edited Sanskrit edition and Tibetan translation, see Snellgrove 1959; Farrow and Menon 1992. For the

on Hevajra and his consort Nairātmyā.⁶⁸ The *Hevajra Tantra* consists of two parts. The sixth chapter in the first part describes the practice, that is “the cause of perfection by means of which one gains the finality of this perfection of Hevajra.”⁶⁹ In this practice, the yogin first puts on a specific set of costumes, including various symbolic ornaments. Then, he takes a qualified girl from the Vajra-family to perform the practice together. Next, music and dance are performed. The text provides the following rationale for the use of song and dance:

“If in joy songs are sung, then let them be the excellent Vajra-songs, and if one dances when joy has arisen, let it be done with release as its object. Then the yogin, self-collected, performs the dance in the place of Hevajra.”⁷⁰

Based on this description in the *Hevajra Tantra*, Kværne concludes in his study of the tantric songbook *Cāryagīti* that “dance and song played an important part in tantric rites.”⁷¹ Other scholars working on Tantric Buddhism have expressed similar opinions. Ray describes “theater and dances” as one of “the most vivid aspects of Tibetan religious life” that “have their roots in the Vajrayāna.”⁷² In his work on violence in early tantric texts, Dalton writes that tantric practitioners are also expected to celebrate the completion of a practice by singing and dancing. In particular, he writes:

...the destruction of an effigy remains at the heart of the rite. Only the surrounding ritual context has changed to include many of the standard Yoga Tantra ritual elements. One must use the right kind of implements, perform the proper *mūdras* and recite the corresponding mantras, and after the destruction is complete, one should make offerings, release the ritual space, dismiss the deities, protect one’s body, and engage in celebration (typically in the form of song and dance).⁷³

But why should tantric practitioners sing and dance in a tantric rite? In the *Hevajra Tantra*, various *dākinīs* headed by Vajragarbha were

Chinese translation of *Hevajra Tantra*, see *Foshuo dabeikongzhi jingang dajiaowang yiguijing* 佛說大悲空智金剛大教王儀軌經 (T892).

⁶⁸ Snellgrove 1959a: 10.

⁶⁹ Snellgrove 1959a: 63.

⁷⁰ For the Sanskrit version of this passage, see Snellgrove 1959b: 18. For the Tibetan translation, see also Snellgrove (1959b: 19).

⁷¹ Kværne 1977: 8.

⁷² Ray 2001:5.

⁷³ Dalton 2011:33.

also puzzled by this, so they asked Bhagavān Vajrasattva: "O may the Lord remove our doubts. (Firstly) as for what is said in the Chapter on Performance about singing and dancing as bestowing perfection, concerning this I have doubts. What is this singing and dancing?"⁷⁴ In reply, Vajrasattva explained the purpose of performing song and dance, how to perform them, and their functions in the tantric rite. He said:

Union takes place at that meeting, for Ḍombī is not there rejected.
Dancing as Śri Heruka with mindful application, undistracted,
Meditating with thought impassioned, the mind uninterrupted in its concentration,
Buddhas and Masters in the Vajra-doctrine, goddesses and yoginīs,
Sing and dance to their utmost in this song and dance.

There comes thereby protection for the troupe and protection for oneself. Thereby the world is reduced to subjection, and all reciting of mantras [is perfected] by it.

Decorously one sings there; decorously one dances there. The leader is first appointed, and then he should note the scent, first of garlic, next of vultures, and then of camphor and sandal-wood. Afterwards he should note the effective power of the song. The sound of a goose and a bee is heard at the end of the song, and he should note the sound of a jackal too in the garden without.⁷⁵

This reply elaborates on the necessity to sing and dance by explaining their key functions in this tantric ritual centered on Hevajra. First, such singing and dancing provide protection to both the practitioners and the assembly present in the ritual. Second, the songs and dances performed in the ritual also help the rite leader to monitor the progress of the practice that is marked by an array of bad and fragrant smells that are described to appear successively.

Concerning the function of song and dance in this tantric rite, Farrow and Menon argue that the dancing movements can help the tantric practitioners to become familiar with the postures of the deities

⁷⁴ Snellgrove 1959a: 100.

⁷⁵ Snellgrove 1959a: 101-102. The majority of this reply is only transliterated in the Chinese translation and therefore, has not been consulted for comparison.

with whom they are to emanate, and the songs help to protect the whole assembly and to subdue the inimical forces. In this manner, “the whole assembly is empowered by the dance and the song during the assembly of the circle of initiates.”⁷⁶ The *Hevajra Tantra* itself, according to Snellgrove’s interpretation of the Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation, only says that because “song symbolizes mantra” and “dance symbolizes meditation,” the yogin should always perform song and dance in the ritual.⁷⁷ The Chinese translation of the *Hevajra Tantra* only says that the varja singers speak pure mantra. Furthermore, a yogin should not perform song and dance for the purpose of obtaining offerings.⁷⁸

The Tibetans are certainly familiar with or at least aware of such discussion on the role of song and dance in the *Hevajra Tantra*. In Tibet, this *Hevajra Tantra* has been most popularly practiced among Bka’ brgyud and Sa skya followers. In 1030, the ‘Brog mi translator Śākya ye shes (993-1074/1077/1087) translated the *Hevajra Tantra* into Tibetan. Following from this, the Sa skya master ‘Khon Dkon mchog rgyal po (1034-1102) who had founded the Sa skya monastery in 1073 also studied the *Hevajra Tantra*. His practice later became a major practice of the Sa skya pas in Tibet.⁷⁹

Apart from providing knowledge of song and dance in tantric ritual, the *Hevajra Tantra* contains discussions of the power of singing in Tibetan writings from the thirteenth century onward, which inform us of how Tibetans have understood the role of music in tantric practices. One discussion is found in commentaries on Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan’s (1182-1251) twelve-folio *Treatise on Music* (*Rol mo’i bstan bcos*).⁸⁰ This *Treatise on Music* has two major commentaries, one by the fourteenth century Zhwa lu scholar Zla ba dpal rin and the other by the seventeenth century Sa skya pa scholar A myes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga’ bsod nams (1597-1659/1660) who con-

⁷⁶ Farrow and Menon 1992: xli.

⁷⁷ For the Sanskrit text, see Snellgrove 1959b: 64: *mantraviśuddhya sthita gīta nartana bhāvanā smṛtā / tasmād gītān ca nātyān ca kuryād yogī sadā sadā //* The Tibetan translation of this passage is in Snellgrove 1959b: 64: *glu ni rnam dag sngags su gnas | | gar ni sgom pa byas pa nyid | | de yi phyir na glu dang gar | | yo gis rtag tu rtag tu byas | |*

⁷⁸ *Foshuo dabei kongzhi jingang dajiao wang yiguijing* 佛說大悲空智金剛大教王儀軌經 (T892: 591c10-591c12): 住金剛歌詠者真言清淨。又復不應為求利養作是金剛歌舞事業。是故瑜伽者當如是行。

⁷⁹ For a comprehensive study of the transmission of the *Hevajra Tantra* in Tibet with a focus on its transmission among the Sa skya School, see Sobisch 2008. See also Snellgrove 1959a: 10.

⁸⁰ For a comprehensive study of the *Treatise on Music*, see the doctoral thesis of Canzio 1978. For further discussion on this treatise, see Tian 1989; Mao 1990; 1993.

stantly quotes the work of Zla ba dpal rin.⁸¹ Concerning the importance of singing, A mnyes zhabs wrote:

*de skad du | chen po drug la ma gyer na || yo ga dbyangs kyi
bstan pa nub || ces gsungs shing | chen po drug ni slob dpon
tsandras | chen po drug la gyer bar bya || sgrub mchod dbang
bsdur rab tu gnas || dus mchod gshin don sbyin sreg rgyas
|| zhes gsung pa ltar ro ||*⁸²

[The *Treatise on Music* says]: “If (we) do not sing on the six grand occasions, the teachings of the Yoga melodies will decline.” The six grand occasions should be understood in accordance with what Master Chandra wrote, “Singing should be applied on the six grand occasions [such as] at the ritual to make offerings, at the empowerment ritual, the consecration ritual, at the periodic offering ritual, at the funeral, and at the fire ritual.”

A treatise on tantric costume, ornaments, and musical instruments by the eighteenth century Tibetan master Bkra shis rgya mtsho also contains an elaboration on the importance and power of singing in tantric practice. Bkra shis rgya mtsho self-identified as a student of a certain Padma rgya mtsho. In the colophon to his treatise, he explains that he wrote this commentary when he was seventy-two years old by request from Sgo me Chos rje Kun bzang snyan grags rgya mtsho from the region of Kokonor lake (*mtsho sgnon po*).⁸³ Concerning the significance of singing and dancing in Buddhist practices, he wrote,

*rdo rje bkod pa las | glu yi yon tan bsam mi khyab || sngon gyi
rgyal ba glu yis 'grub || rig 'dzin rdo rje glu yi 'dren || rnal
'byor dbang phyug glu yis 'grub || bstan pa rgya mtsho glu yis
spel || srid pa'i bum o glu yis 'dren || bdud dang srin glu yis*

⁸¹ Zla bad pal rin's commentary is entitled *Dbyangs kyi bstan bcos blo gsal mgul rgyan*. In his commentary on the *Treatise on Music*, A mnyes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams mentions Zla ba dpal rin as Chandragomin.

⁸² A mnyes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams 2000: vol.6, 506. For the Chinese translation of A mnyes zhabs 's commentary, see Zhao 1990.

⁸³ See Rgan po Bkra shis rgya mtsho 1996:170. The author appears to be a Rnying ma pa with some connection with the Smin grol gling monastery in central Tibet. In the colophon of another text explaining in detail the tenth day of the month entitled *Tshes bcu'i rnam bshad blo gsal rgyan gyi phreng ba*, the author called himself Old man (*Rgan po*) Bkra shis rgya mtsho. See Rgan po Bkra shis rgya mtsho 2002: 37.

'dul || dngos grub rgya mtsho glu yis 'bebs || ces rdo rje glu yi
yon tan ni gsang rgyud mtha' yas pa nas bstan | |⁸⁴

The *Vajra Tantra* says,⁸⁵ "The virtue of song is inconceivable. The former Buddha accomplished through song, the tantric practitioners are guided by diamond song, the lord of yogins accomplished through song, the ocean of dharma are spread by song, men and women of the world are guided by song, demons and spirits are tamed by song, the ocean of accomplishment are brought by song." This is a demonstration of the virtue of diamond songs in the infinite Tantric teachings.

Torn between the avocation of strict observance of the monastic regulations against the performance, teaching, and consumption of song, dance, and instrumental music and the necessity to sing and dance in tantric rituals, how did the Tibetans come to accept such monks as Shar Skal Idan rgya mtsho and the Fifth Dalai Lama, who apparently violated these regulations?

A decisive factor that has radically affected the Tibetans' approach towards music in Buddhism is the co-existence of a set of three vows (*sdom gsum*): the Vinaya vows in Buddhist canon law for ordained Buddhists, the Bodhisattva vows for lay or ordained Buddhist practitioners, and the tantric (*gsang sngag*) vows for tantric practitioners. Among these three sets of vows, only the Vinaya vows discuss the regulations against song, dance, and instrumental music. Unlike the Vinaya vows, the fourteen root tantric vows summarized by Tsong kha pa do not prohibit the use of song, dance, and instrumental music.⁸⁶ Depending on one's interpretation of the interrelations of these three sets of vows, performing song, dance, or instrumental music is

⁸⁴ Bkra shis rgya mtsho 1996: 106. Bkra shis rgya mtsho then continued to quote from *Lalitavistara Sūtra* and elaborated on the power of singing the seven or six musical notes. The concept of the seven musical notes was imported from India. These notes are: *madhyama* (*bar ma pa*), *rṣbha* (*drang srong pa*), *gandh sr* (*sa 'dzin pa*), *ṣaḍja* (*drug ldan*), *pañcama* (*lga pa*), *dh a paa* (*blo gsal*), *niṣāda* ('*khor nyan*).

⁸⁵ The colophon of the Tibetan translation of this tantric text states that the Indian preceptor Dharmabodhi translated it in collaboration with Dānarakṣita and the Tibetan translator Btsan skyes. For the full text in Tibetan translation, see *De bzhin gshes pa thams cad kyi thugs gsang ba'i ye shes don gyi snying po rdo rje bkod pa'i rgyud rnal 'byor grub pa'i lung kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo theg pa chen po mngon par rtogs pa chos kyi rnam grangs rnam par bkod pa*, in *Bka' 'gyur*, Dpe bsdur ma (Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008), *Ka*, vol.101, pp.219-672.

⁸⁶ See the English translation of Tsong kha pa's list of the fourteen tantric vows in Sparham 2005: 83-113. For the Sanskrit verses of these fourteen vows summarized by Tsong kha pa, see Lévi 1929: 266-267.

either a violation for exoteric Buddhists who observe the Vinaya vows, or a required skill for Buddhists who are not bound by Vinaya vows but only by Bodhisattva vows and/or Tantric vows.

In his study of the literary tradition of the three sets of vows in Tibet, Sobisch summarizes two major Tibetan dispositions on the interrelations of the three sets of vows.⁸⁷ One view describes the three sets of vows from inferior to superior metaphorically, as star, moon, and sun. In particular, the inferior Vinaya vows would enter a dormant mood when outshined by the superior Bodhisattva or Tantric vows. In other words, one who has obtained the more "advanced" Bodhisattva or Tantric vows can dismiss the regulation against song, dance, and instrumental music because this regulation only appears in the inferior Vinaya vows. The other view maintains that all three sets of vows are essentially the same and must be observed to the same degree. In other words, one who has taken the Vinaya vows must continue to abstain from song, dance, and instrumental music even after he has obtained the Bodhisattva or Tantric vows.

Therefore, as long as the Vinaya vows prohibit the use of song, dance, and instrumental music, those who consider the three sets of vows to be substantively the same must always observe this prohibition even after becoming a tantric practitioner. Yet, if we accept the superior-inferior theory, anyone who has received tantric initiation no longer needs to observe the Vinaya vows for inferiors that prohibits song, dance, and instrumental music. Hence, depending on one's interpretation of the interrelations of the three sets of vows, Buddhists who sing and dance in Tibet are either cursed or glorified.

⁸⁷ See Sobisch 2002: 14-15.

**Appendix 1:
Indic and Tibetan Texts on Novice Precepts**

- L1/
NĀ Nāgārjuna.
Āryamūlasarvāstivādiśramaṇerakārikā ('Phags pa gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba'i dge tshul gyi tshig le'ur byas pa). In *Bstan 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Su, vol.93, 725-732. 83y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.
- L2 Anonymous.
Sarvāstivādiśramaṇerakarāṇa (Thams cad yod par smra ba rnams kyi dge tshul gyi 83y aba). In *Bstan 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Su, vol.93, 800-903. 83y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.
- L3 Kalyāṇamitra.
Śramaṇeraśikṣapadasūtra (Dge tshul gyi bslab pa'i gzhi'i mdo). In *Bstan 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Su, vol.93, 848-884. 83y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.
- L4 Kamalasīla.
**Śramaṇapañcāśatkārikāpradābhismaraṇa* (Dge sbyong gi k'a ri k'a lnga bcu pa mdo tsham du bshad pa). In *Bstan 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Su, vol.93, 733-799. 83y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.
- S1a /ŚĀ Śākyaprabha.
Āryamūlasarvāstivādiśramaṇerakārikā ('Phags pa gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba'i dge tshul gyi tshig le'ur byas pa). In *Bstan 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Shu, vol.93, 167-199. 83y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.
- S1b /ĀBH Śākyaprabha. *Āryamūlasarvāstivādiśramaṇerakārikāvṛttiprabhāvati* ('Phags pa gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba'i dge tshul gyi tshig le'ur byas pa'i 'grel pa 'od ldan). In *Bstan 'gyur*, Dpe bsdur ma, Shu, vol.93, 200-443. 83y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.
- S2 Vinītadeva.
Trisatakārikāvyaḳyāna (Tshig le'ur byas pa sum brgya pa'i rnam par bshad pa). In *Bstan 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Shu, vol.93, 444-722. 83y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.

- N1 Anonymus. *Sramaṇeravarṣāgraṃ* (*Dge tshul gyi dang po'i lo*). In *Bstan 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Su, vol.93, 904-910. 84y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.
- N2 Anonymus. *Bslab bya bcu'i cho ga bzhugs*. In *Bstan 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Su, vol. 93, 1443-1446. 84y aba: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994-2008.
- K1 Bya 'dul 'dzin Brtson 'grus 'bar (1091-1167). *'Dul ba 'od ldan gyi tikka*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrigs thengs gnyis pa*, vol. 31, pp. 77-181. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007.
- K2a Phywa pa Chos kyi sewng ge (1109-1169). *'Od ldan zhes 84y aba'i tshig don rab gsal ldeb*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrigs thengs dang po*, vol.9, pp.251-527. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2006.
- K2b Phywa pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109-1169). *Dge tshul rnam kyi bslab bya'i rim pa ston pa'i rnam bshad*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrigs thengs dang po*, vol.9, 533-598. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2006.
- K3a Sbal ti Brtson 'grus dbang phyug (1129-1215). *'Grel ba 'od ldan gyi tshig don gsal byed*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrigs thengs gnyis pa*, vol.36, pp.11-141. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007.
- K3b Sbal ti Brtson 'grus dbang phyug (1129-1215). *'Grel ba 'od ldan gyi tshig don gsal byed kyi mi 'dra ba*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrig thengs gnyis pa*, vol.36, pp.143-273. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007.
- K4 'Dar Tshul khrim rgyal po (12th). *Sum brgya pa'i tikka*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrigs thengs gnyis pa*, vol.34, pp. 47-97. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007.
- K5 Rog Chos kyi dbang phyug (12th). *Dge tshul rnam kyi tshig le'ur byas pa'I rnam bshad*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrigs thengs gnyis pa*, vol.34, 129-

191. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007.

- K6 Anonymous.
Tshig le'ur byas pa sum brgya pa'i don gsal bar byed pa. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrigs thengs gsum pa*, vol.79, 355-396. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009.
- K7 Anonymous.
'Grel ba 'od dang ldan pa'i bsdus don. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrigs thengs gnyis pa*, vol.38, pp.155-173. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007.
- T1 Rgyal tshabs Dar ma rin chen (1364-1432).
Dge tshul gyi bslab bya gnam rtse lding ma. In *Smad rgyud grwa tshang gi chos spyod rgyas pa*, vol. 11, pp. 581-596. Hunsur: Gudmed Tantric College, 1982. TBRC W00EGS1016253.
- T2 Zhwa dmar Chos gras ye shes (1453-1524).
Dge tshu gyi bslab pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa thar pa'i lam gyi sgron me. In *Gsung 'byum*, vol. 2, pp. 875-895. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009.
- T3a Tshe mchog gling Yongs 'dzin Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713-1793).
Dge tshul gyi bslab bya'i sdom tshig. In *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 18, pp. 107-111. New Delhi: Tibetan House Library, 1974. TBRC W1022.
- T3b Tshe mchog gling Yongs 'dzin Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713-1793).
'Dul ba'i bslab bya 'od ldan snying po. In *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 18, pp. 113-297. New Delhi: Tibetan House Library, 1974. TBRC W1022.
- T4 Gu ge Yongs 'dzin Blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1748-1813). *Dge tshul gyi sdom pa'i bcas mtshams bsrung tshul ltung ba'i chu lon*. In *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 3, pp. 25-50. New Delhi: Chophel legdan, 1976. TBRC W23879.
- T5 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912).
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- T6 Glag bla Bsod nam mchog 'grub (1862-1944).
Dge tshul gyi bslab bya nyung bsdus. In *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 4, pp. 633-644. Delhi: Dkon mhog lha bris, 1997. TBRC W22389.
- T7 Rong tha chung tshang Blo bzang dam chos rgya mtsho (1865-1917).
Dge tshul gyi bslab bya gsal bar bshad pa dge legs pad ma 'byed pa'i snyang ba. In *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 2, pp. 103-117. New Delhi: N. Sopa, 1975. TBRC W13528.
- T8 Brag dkar Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin snyan grags (1866-1928).
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- T9a Gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba (1871-1927).
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- T9b Gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba (1871-1927).
'Phags pa gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba'i dge tshul gyi tshig le'ur byas pa k'a ri k'a'i mchan 'grel. In *Gzhung chen bcu gsum*, vol. 2, pp. 315-326. Delhi: Konchog lhadrepa, 1987b. TBRC W23198.

Appendix 2: Occurrence of References

Author	Text	1	2	3	4
		Intr. Story	Exceptions	Required Skill	4-fold Scheme
		x: drug sde	X1: ston pa'i yon tan stod pa X2: chos 'chad pa	x: dben pa	x1 : gzhi x2 : bsam x2a : 'du

			X3: rgyun chags gsum pa		shes x2b : kun slong x3: sbyor ba x4: mthar thug
Nāgārjuna	L1				
Anonymous	L2		x1; x2	x	
Kalyāṇamitra	L3		x1; x3	x	
Kamalasīla	L4	x	x1	x	
Sākyaprabha	S1a		x1; x2	x	
Sākyaprabha	S1b		x1; x2	x	
Vinītadeva	S2		x1	x	
Bya	K1		x1; x2; x3		x1, x2a, x2b, x3, x4
Phywa pa	K2a	x	x1; x2		x1, x2, x3, x4
Phywa pa	K2b	x	x2		x1, x2a, x2b, x3, x4
Sbal ti	K3a	x	x1		x1, x2, x3, x4
Sbal ti	K3b		x1; x3	x	x1, x2, x3, x4
'Dar	K4	x	x1; x2; x3		x1, x2, x3, x4
Rog	K5	x			x1, x2, x3, x4
Anonymous	K6	x	x1		
Rgyal tshabs	T1		x1; x2; x3		
Zhwa dmar	T2			x	
Tshe mchog	T3a				
Tshe mchog	T3b	x ⁸⁸	x1	x	
Gu ge	T4				
'Ju	T5	x			
Glag bla	T6				
Rong	T7		x1		

⁸⁸ This text mentioned the specific names of the monks in the band of six: 'char ka,'gro, m.gyogs, nabs so, dmar ser can.

Brag dkar	T8		x1; x2		
Gzhan phan	T9a		x1; x2		
Gzhan phan	T9b				

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Listening with the Gods: Offering, Beauty and Being in Tibetan Ritual Music

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1. Introduction

This study starts with a double functional and hermeneutical question: what is the role of music in Tibetan ritual, and what is its meaning to the ritual practitioner? As we will see, the first part of the question is relatively easily answered, while the second necessitates a move beyond a functional framing and towards aesthetic concerns and issues of selfhood and identity. Music, in the context of Tibetan ritual, is used as one of a set of offerings (*mchod pa*)¹ congruent with the human senses that are offered to the deities of the ritual. Music is merely one component of these ritual offerings, though perhaps the most dramatic to the observer sitting in a monastic hall and feeling the vibrations of the drums, cymbals and trumpets deep in their body. The intent of the music is to offer a pleasing sound to the deities invoked in the ritual. In descriptions of ritual music, aesthetic adjectives of “pleasing” and “beautiful” are common. Looking at a range of Tibetan language sources, we see that while descriptors such as “pleasing” and “beautiful” are often used, there is, on the other hand, little explication of just what constitutes a “beautiful” sound. I propose that motivation is a key element in the offering of a beautiful sound. Motivation is a central determining factor in Tibetan religious practice and acts as bridge across, on the one hand, the functional role of music in ritual and, on the other, aesthetic considerations of the beautiful and pleasing. As supports for this bridge, I suggest that Paul Ricœur’s theories of emplotment and “being-as” can assist in moving away from questions such as the “role of music in ritual” and towards a formulation of Tibetan ritual music as an indivisible element in an experiential expansion of horizons of selfhood.

¹ Tibetan terms and names in parentheses are transliterations using the Wylie system. As much as possible, however, simplified transcriptions will be used throughout the text (with a transliteration in Wylie in brackets at the first occurrence).

2. *Mchod pa: Music as a ritual offering*

The music heard in Tibetan monastic rituals is one of a set of offerings given to the deity of that particular ritual. These offerings are generally construed in a set of 7 (*mchod pa bdun*) or 8 (*mchod pa brgyad*). In both cases, the range of offerings is intended to delight all of the senses. Flowers, for example, are offered as a beautiful sight, incense as a pleasing smell. Music is directed toward the ears of the deity, though as we will see, it also has a mental component.

References to the Eight offerings are found in the *Kangyur* (*Bka' 'gyur*), for example, from the "Tantra of the Great Magical Web of the Goddess" (*lha mo sgyu 'phrul dra ba chen po'i rgyud*) we read,

Offer with praise through the eight offerings²

In the "Root Tantra of Chenrezig" (*Spyan ras gzigs kyi rtsa rgyud*) instructions are given to

Set out and arrange the Eight offerings³

In the *Tengyur* (*Bstan 'gyur*) and in the writings of individual authors we find further, more detailed descriptions with specific desirable qualities associated with the offerings. From the "In Praise of Wisdom Illuminating White Varahi", is an abbreviated list which includes music,

Having taken up in awareness (*blo*) flowers, incense, butter lamps and perfumed water, food, music and whatever more there is, offer with a respectful mind (*yid*).⁴

Terdag Lingpa (Gter bdag gling pa, 1646-1714), one of the founders of Mindroling monastery which was known for its arts, wrote about music as offering in this poetical passage:

Food of a hundred tastes, melodies and ritual music,
Offer all these good offerings increasing like an ocean of clouds.⁵

² *Mchod pa brgyad kyis bstod par mchod* (*Bka' 'gyur / dpe bsdur ma*), Volume 103: 10).

³ *Mchod pa brgyad bshams te* (*Bka' 'gyur / dpe bsdur ma*), Volume 91: 863).

⁴ *Me tog bdug spos mar me dang / dri chab zhal zas rol mo ci mchis rnam / blo yis blangs nas gus pa'i yid kyis mchod* (*Slob dpon kong ba sbyin*, in *Btsan 'gyur / dpe bsdur ma*, Vol.12: 774).

⁵ *Ro brgya zas dbyangs snyan rol mo sogs / kun bzang mchod sprin rgya mtshor spel te mchod /* (Gter bdag gling pa, *Bka' ma dong sprugs dang gter kha gong 'og ga'i skor*,

Centuries later, Jamgon Kongtrul ('Jam mgon kong sprul, 1813-1899) in his *Treasury of Knowledge*, also describes music as offering:

In contrast to [mundane music and dance], which cause the mind to wander in all directions due to fleeting attachments and the desire to dress provocatively, the [ritual] playing of large and small drums, as well as big-boss cymbals (*sbub chol*) and small-boss cymbals (*sil snyan*) is integral to the way of [secret] mantra, with the purpose of making offerings to the [three] precious jewels (*dkon mchog*).⁶

Flowers are offered to appeal to the sight, incense to smell, butter lamps give light, food satisfies the sense of taste, music is directed to the sense of hearing. If one of the elements is missing it can be imagined though they are generally listed as a set and offered as such, real or imagined. The collection of offerings used in Tibetan ritual is grounded in all the senses. While the term “visualization” is habitually used to describe the generation of offerings and deities, what is being “visualized” can actually be smells, sights, or sounds. An open question remains: are we being overwhelmed by the privilege given to vision? Are imagined smells and sound for example “smelled” and “heard”?

In my own fieldwork, I worked for many years with Phursang Lama (phur bzang, 1938-2016), the former ritual music director at the Tibetan Buddhist monastery, Karmaraj Mahavihar, at Swayambhu stūpa in Kathmandu. Phursang Lama was a Karma Kagyu (karma bka' brgyud) monk raised in Tibet who fled to Nepal in 1959 and, as such, was a member of a fading generation of monks trained in pre-1959 Tibet.⁷ In a 2009 presentation at the Latse Library in New York City, he was asked, “how does music serve Tibetan Buddhism?” (I think what the questioner meant was, what is the role of music in Tibetan Buddhism?—which is how Phursang Lama responded). He replied:

From the practitioner's point of view, when you engage in a Tantra meditation, especially when you do the extensive visualizations and you engage in transforming yourself into a deity, you visualize all the offerings that you would offer to the field of these Buddhas and Bodhisattavas. When you invite Buddhas and Bo-

260:3). This passage is also found in Blo gros mtha' yas, *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo* (Vol. 31: 504).

⁶ Jamgon Kongtrul 2012, p. 294.

⁷ Phursang Lama passed away in December 2016 and this paper is dedicated to his profound learning and devotion.

dhisattvas in front of you, and then you again visualize yourself as a deity, and from your heart you spread the offering helpers who bring offerings to the deity in front of you, for the practitioner's point of view, it [the music] is important because it is part of your practice.⁸

Phursang Lama not only describes music as an offering, carried to the deity by visualized helpers, he also explains the mechanisms of the ritual—the visualizations and the identification of the self with the deity.

In answer to the question “what is the role of music in Tibetan ritual” we see both an answer— “music as offering” and also the start of a further inquiry. Music is one of a set of offerings, appealing to all senses, that is used in rituals and that leads ultimately, as Phursang says, to a visualization of oneself as a deity. Before moving on to the implications of this type of visualization upon conceptions of self, we must first ask, what kind of music should be offered, what are the aesthetics of the music offerings?

3. *The Aesthetics of the ritual music offerings: What do the gods listen to?*

In answer to the question regarding aesthetics let us look at how music offerings are described.⁹ Contemporary musicologist Gendün Phelgye (Dge 'dun 'phel rgyas) in an article on Tibetan Buddhist music in the *Tibetan arts journal* (*Bod ljongs sgyu tshal zhib 'jug*) writes:

In order to satisfy the pleasure of the outer, inner, and secret gods and protectors, and the assembly of gods of the mandala of this and the transcendent world, offer many outer, inner, and secret offerings. From the offering of sung melodies, flow all the tributaries of the ocean of melody and pleasant and beautiful ritual music (*rol mo*¹⁰).¹¹

⁸ The translations here and below from Phursang Lama were done by the Tibetan translator at the presentation. All other translations, unless otherwise referenced, are my own with accompanying responsibility for any mistakes.

⁹ Vantor in his 1976 article “Aesthetics and Ritual Music” states that “The *raison d'être* of this music is therefore far removed from any preoccupation with aesthetics.” (1976:32) While this is true from a Western art perspective, I propose that an examination of textual sources along with discussion from contemporary practitioners, neither of which he included, reveals a vital focus on conceptions of beauty in the music.

¹⁰ *Rol mo* is a highly multivalent term used to mean cymbals as well as ritual music as a whole. In this context I have translated it as “ritual music”.

“Pleasant” here is *snyan* while “beautiful” is what I translated from the Tibetan *yid 'ong*. I chose this passage because it densely packs in two sentences the conception of music as a beautiful offering and the motivation behind the offering. One offers pleasant and beautiful music in order to please the deities.

From the Mindroling tradition, reading Terdag Lingpa (Gter bdag gling pa, 1646-1714), we also see a description of music as pleasing and beautiful:

Pleasing melody is attractive, smooth melody
dissolves into the pleasant sound of the gods.¹²

Returning to the *Tengyur* there is a variation in a passage from Zhi ba lha's *Entering the Bodhisattva's Conduct*, where *snyan* is used with *yid 'ong*.

Ritual music possessing pleasant qualities and beauty.¹³

Both of these texts use the word *snyan*. Gendün Phelgye and Zhi Ita ba also use *yid 'ong* while Terdag Lingpa writes *yid 'phrog*.

Snyan (in its nominalized form *snyan pa*) is a term rich in overlapping meanings. It is generally translated as “pleasant,” as in pleasing to the ears, and is used to refer to what is heard, such as speech and music. “*Yid 'ong*” is also at times translated as pleasant along with “lovely”, “beautiful”, “attractive”. With *yid 'ong* (and with *yid 'phrog*) there is a definite connotation of being beautiful or attractive to the mind.

Again turning to a contemporary perspective, Phursang Lama in the Latse Library conference was asked why the ritual music sounds like it does. He replied:

As you heard the sound of the cymbals [which he had just demonstrated], you might wonder why we are using this kind of music in the monastery. To us, the essence of the ritual music is a form of offering, that offering should appeal to the ear of the Buddhas and

¹¹ *phyi nang gsang ba'i lha dang bsrung ma 'jig rten dang 'jig rten las 'das pa'i dkyil 'khor lha tshogs rnams dgyes pa skongs phyir phyi nang gsang gsum gyi mchod pa rnam pa mang po 'bul ba blang ba sgra dbyangs kyi mchod pa las dbyangs kyi yan lag rgya mtsho'i sgra kun gyi zhes dang rol mo dbyangs snyan yid 'ong rnams zhes sogs*

¹² *dbyangs snyan yid 'phrog 'jam pa'i dbyangs sgra yi lha mo snyan la thim* (Gter-bdag gling pa, Gter bdag gling pa, *Bka' ma dong sprugs dang gter kha gong 'og ga'i skor* 214).

¹³ *Rol mo dbyangs snyan yid 'ong ldan* (Zhi ba lha, *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod la 'jug pa*, Vol. 61 : 957).

Bodhisattvas. Any beautiful and melodious sound which is pleasant can be offered as a music offering.

Again we see in his statement the formulation of music as offering, an offering that should be beautiful (he used the word *snyan pa* here). But he goes on to say that any melodious sound can be used as a musical offering and it is here that we can detour from aesthetics to ask about motivation, a detour that will ultimately reframe the issues of function and aesthetics.

But before we detour, I have to say that the diversion will not fully answer the question—so just what is beautiful and pleasing? What are the characteristics of the beautiful and pleasing? A more recent work by contemporary Tibetologist Sangdag (gsang bdag) suggests that it is a balance between harsh and pleasant sounds and between sound-with-melody and sound-without-melody.¹⁴ Furthermore, traditional conceptions of music evoke that it should fit the character of the deity, that is, fierce deities such as Mahākāla should be offered fierce music, peaceful deities should be offered peaceful music, and so on. But what remains an outstanding question for research is, what in particular constitutes a “beautiful” melody and what is considered a normative, well-executed performance?

4. *The motivation behind musically beautiful offerings*

In the Latse conference, Phursang Lama was questioned about what practitioners think of when they play the music during a ritual. He replied,

We make the music as a form of offering and when you provide these kinds of offerings, one of the really important things to remember is that as we enjoy pleasant sounds (*snyan pa*), and beautiful melodies, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas also enjoy beautiful sound. And so our ultimate goal is to please the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with a beautiful sound, our motivation is to please them with a beautiful sound to [their] ears. That is the initial thinking we have. And then when we make these beautiful sounds, we imagine that they hear them in a very beautiful way and that they become pleased with these sounds. That’s how we think when we are making this music.

¹⁴ Gsang bdag 2001, p. 3.

The motivation behind the music is to please the deities of the ritual. Underlying the practice of the ritual is the motivation, as usually conceptualized across sects of Tibetan Buddhism, to obtain Buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings through the means of wisdom and compassion. Tashi Gyatso (bkra shis rgya mtsho), a Nyingma author of a commentary on the ritual objects used by the Nyingma sect, explains,

In order to keep secret from normal beings and to dispel darkness and delusion, the yogi, through the supreme secret practice, should use all the materials [i.e. instruments] that give voice to sound pleasantly, all the various sources [of sound] of ritual music, such as the conch, *mkhar* drum, clay drum, *damaru*, *pi wang*, and *ko ko li*, in order to arrive close to perfection.¹⁵

Some portions of this passage remain a bit opaque. I reference the passage, however, because it once again brings up the aesthetic of *snyan pa*, of a sound being pleasant and furthermore suggests motivations for the music, namely, to dispel darkness and delusion and to arrive closer to perfection through the practice of the music. The author goes on:

Furthermore, to the yogic practitioner, as for what is called ritual music (*rol mo*), its appearance is music of the mind. To the common person, it appears to the mind as music.¹⁶

This is a knotty passage, but one of particular importance. I interpret the meaning as follows: to the ritual practitioner, the manifestation, or appearance, of music is actually music of the mind. The appearance and the music are one (the Tibetan uses the linking verb *yin* as in *X is Y*). To the common person, music moves the mind but is merely an appearance. In the next section we return to an analysis of the dynamic of visualizing oneself as the deity in the ritual practice, which I think will make this passage clearer. It is evident though, in both Phursang's view and more so in Tashi Gyatso (et al.)'s writing, that motivation is a key element. The motivation to make sounds pleasant to the deities makes the sounds pleasant. It is the motivation that supplies the aesthetics. Tashi Gyatso further grounds this in a

¹⁵ *sgrub mchog gsang bas rnal 'byor ba / skye ba'i yid rnam gsang phyir dang / gti mug mun pa gzhom pa'i phyir / dung dang mkhar rnga rdza rnga dang / cang te'u pir wang ko ko li / snyan par sgrogs pa'i rdzas rnam kun / sna tshogs 'byung ba'i rol mo ste / nye bar rdzogs su 'byor bar bya* (Bkra shis rgya mtsho et al. 1996:, 128-129).

¹⁶ *de yang rol mo zhes pa rnal 'byor bas snang ba / sems kyi rol mo yin la gang zag phal pa rnam ni / sems snang bas rol mo 'gyur ro* (Bkra shis rgya mtsho et al. 1996, 129)

Buddhist soteriology that orients ritual (and its music components) toward the path of dispelling darkness and delusion.

5. Ricœur's "Being-as": the move from aesthetics to ontology

"Ritual becomes a domain of human experience and cultural production that offers a respite from hermeneutic anxiety."¹⁷

In my conclusion I want to enlist the assistance of concepts of the French philosopher Paul Ricœur. In his later works (the series *Time and Narrative*), he suggests a homologous mode of understanding which can be adopted in an examination of the complex elements that constitute Tibetan ritual. In these works, Ricœur turns his attention to how meaning is created in metaphor and narrative and how this newly created meaning reveals a new sense of being. A distinguishing characteristic of Ricœur's hermeneutics is its world disclosing aspect. As we have seen in our discussion of music as offering within a highly structured ritual performance of transformation, Tibetan rituals lead the practitioner to the disclosure of a world that he or she could inhabit. John Powers in his discussion of deity yoga emphasized the repetition of ritual as a "technique for becoming progressively more familiar with the thoughts and deeds of a Buddha, until the state of Buddhahood is actualized."¹⁸ In this sense we are addressing a soteriology, a religious system designed to induce a *metanoia*, a change at a fundamental basis of the self.

In *Time and Narrative* Ricœur expounds "The plot of a narrative... 'grasps together' and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative as a whole".¹⁹ Ricœur's theory of narrative situates understanding in a schematizing operation, which, in the case of fictional and historical narratives, suspends the referential function of descriptive language in order to posit a remade world of reordered connections. "What is communicated, in the final analysis is, beyond the sense of a work, the world it projects and that constitutes its horizon."²⁰ In demonstrating that poetical language incorporates a capacity for revealing a level of reference deeper than that of descriptive language, he points to "those ontological aspects of our being-in-the-world that cannot be spoken of directly.

¹⁷ Scharf 2008: 252.

¹⁸ Powers 2007, 272.

¹⁹ Ricœur 1984, I, x.

²⁰ Ricœur 1984, 77.

Seeing as thus not only implies a *saying as* but also a *being as*.²¹ In Tibetan ritual, the “seeing as” of the visualizations leads to the “being-as” of the deity. The use of the word “visualization” might seem to presuppose the predominance of the visual sense but in fact, as we have seen above, the offerings provided to the deities of the ritual encompass all the senses. Here we can think again about the knotty little statement of Tashi Gyatso (et al.): “Furthermore, to the yogic ritual practitioner, as for what is called ritual music (*rol mo*), its appearance is music of the mind. To the common person it appears to the mind as music.” To the yogic practitioner, the music moves beyond appearance, beyond “seeing as” to “being-as” music of the mind.

Ritual music, as an offering motivated by the desire to please the deity, is an element of a ritual constructed to remake the horizons of the practitioner. It is part of ritual system that enables, through a fusion of horizons with the deity of a ritual, the experience of new intelligible modes of being. This proposal of selfhood entered into through the performance of Tibetan ritual engages all of the senses, and is inherently linked to the motivations of the practitioner. In such a formulation a beautiful musical offering becomes both a structured performance of a traditional musical system and a fluid, horizon-stretching container of religious experience. In this regard we can move beyond the descriptive sense of “what do the gods listen to” to a mode of being where we can “listen with” the gods.

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²¹ Kearney 1989, 17.

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Looking Back at Tibetan Performing Arts Research by Tibetans in the People's Republic of China: Advocating for an Anthropological Approach

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 Although Tibetan performing arts have a long history and a rich tradition, academic research by Tibetans in the People's Republic of China (PRC) on this topic has started fairly recently, and the process is both complex and unusual. Contextual factors, such as personal life experience, education level, type of academic training received and language in which research is written, have influenced and shaped the researchers' approaches to Tibetan performing arts. These factors explain the current diversity of viewpoints within the field. At the very start, the perception and definition of what constitutes 'performing arts' is problematic, especially considering Tibet's vast geographical and cultural diversity. In this article, I will present a general overview of previous studies and will close with a discussion of future opportunities and challenges in Tibetan performing arts research today. I will advocate for an approach that has been neglected until recently by most scholars in the PRC, that is, an anthropological perspective.

1 – The Category of 'Performing Arts'

Tibet has probably always been a place rife with 'performances'. Whether or not these events belong to the category of 'art' is debatable, but they all contain the basic elements of 'performing arts': time, space, physical movement, agents and audiences. However, in the Tibetan language, there is no equivalent to the English 'performing arts', which covers each and every type of performance. Rather, all performing styles are relatively independent from each

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other. In addition, in this sparsely populated, vast territory, social and cultural differences are significant, so it is difficult to formulate a concept or definition large enough to encompass all forms of performance. We could translate 'performing arts' as '*khrab ston sgyu rtsal* (lit. performance-showing-art), for example, but such a formulation does not appear in classical texts. In colloquial Tibetan, *glu gar* refers to 'song and dance', but it excludes drama and other forms of spectacle. *Ltad mo* means 'performance' or 'show' (it is derived from *lta ba*, 'to look at'), but its use goes well beyond performing arts, the adjective *ltad mo chen po* (lit. 'big spectacle') referring to anything worth looking at. *Zlos gar* is used in written and classical Tibetan to translate the Indic category of 'drama' (Skt. *nāṭya*, *nāṭaka*), but its use in colloquial Tibetan is rather recent and, at least in Dbus gtsang, it differs from its literary meaning. In everyday spoken usage, it has come to designate a broad category of song and dance performances, of a modern style, and purely for entertainment. The colloquial usage thus excludes drama, for example *a lce lha mo*, in contrast with the literary usage that sometimes associated *zlos gar* and *a lce lhamo* explicitly. Terms such as *ltad mo* and *zlos gar* describe types of entertaining performances devoid of religious or ritual content, but most Tibetan traditional performing arts *do* include a religious dimension, for example '*cham* (the monastic dances), or various forms of ritual. It is culturally inappropriate to characterize these religious rituals as mere *ltad mo* or *zlos gar*.

Other concepts, such as *rtsed sna* (lit. 'various games') or *rtsed rigs* (lit. 'types of games'), are not specific to performances; rather, they refer to entertainment (*rtsed* is derived from *rtse ba*, 'to play', 'to have fun') and can even include sports. The term *rig rtsal* appears in pre-1950s Tibetan texts, but had a different meaning than the one currently in use. In its modern usage, the term is an approximate equivalent to the English 'performing arts'. *Rig rtsal* translates the Chinese *wenyi* (文艺), condensing two words, literature (*wenxue* 文学, T. *rtsom rig*) and art (*yishu* 艺术, T. *sgyu rtsal*). The original meaning of *rig rtsal* translated to 'level of knowledge'. Its modern use is rather artificial, limited to official denominations, such as in the 1980s journal *Tibetan Popular Arts* (*Bod kyi mang tshogs rig rtsal*) and having no currency in everyday life. In parts of Amdo, *glu len gar rtsed* (lit. 'singing and dancing') is used to refer to secular performing arts, but it is not known when the term was coined.

Traditional Tibetan arts could, in a way, be divided into two categories, sacred and secular. The former is related to religion, to the ultimate preoccupations of liberation from the cycle of rebirths and compassion, while the latter refers to this-worldly preoccupations, such as prosperity. However, a stark contrast does not hold in a

Tibetan context, since most 'secular' performing arts have religious components, and likewise, many 'religious' rituals attended by laypeople feature games and bawdy behaviour. I hold the view² that what runs through the whole range of traditional Tibetan performing arts, whether sacred or secular, are two important and culturally fundamental concepts difficult to render in English: *rten 'brel* (auspicious causal connections), which is sought after, and *rnam rtog* (suspicion of bad omens, a form of unrest in the mind), which is to be avoided. *Rten 'brel* is composed of two parts, *rten* (support) and *'brel* (linkage, reliance). The doublet, stemming from Indian philosophy (translating the Sanskrit *Pratītyasamutpāda*, dependent origination) implies that all phenomena are interconnected and interdependent. But the term is also widely used in laypeople's everyday conversations, where it connotes fortunate causation, or the notion that events unfold in a chain that brings auspiciousness. The term *rnam rtog* has the completely opposite connotation. Whereas *rten 'brel* is about attracting fortune, *rnam rtog* is about dispelling misfortune. They are based on Tibetan conceptions of luck (*phvya, g.yang*). *Rnam rtog* refers to a state of mind in which one fears adversity (illness, pollution, bad luck, etc.). A variety of rituals are deployed to avert the unfortunate events that are feared, for example *sgye dang sgye mo* rituals in western Tibet (Bian duo 1991), or some aspects of the *dgu tor 'cham* dances. These are very old Tibetan conceptions, maybe predating the advent of Buddhism, and, I believe they are the cultural matrix of performing arts in Tibet, the reason why Tibetans engage in performing activities. Of course, the social, cultural and religious characteristics of the successive historical periods, especially since Buddhism became the dominant cultural force in Tibet, have further enriched and improved the content and form of Tibetan performing arts.

2 – Performances Through Social and Artistic Changes

Over the course of their long history, Tibetan performing arts have consisted of various forms of singing and dancing presentations, verbal art performances, plays, and sacred or secular rituals, each with their own characteristics. Since the 1950s, Tibetan society has undergone tremendous changes, significantly affecting the material and organisational aspects of the traditional performing arts. Besides, state troupes have been established, where state narratives have become the main artistic theme to be depicted. For instance, *a lce lha*

² This is what I have argued in my book (Sangji Dongzhi, 2015, pp.205-209).

mo, or simply *lha mo*, the Tibetan traditional opera, transitioned from being a 'local' tradition deeply rooted in Tibetan culture to a 'national' tradition contextualized in the State narrative. With the professionalization of artistry in state-run troupes, performers have become state employees, sometimes national-level cadres with substantial monthly wages. Compared with the itinerant performing troupes such as the *sKyor mo lung pa* of the past, we see that performers have experienced radical changes. During the Mao era (1950s-end of 1970s), performances contained abundant references to revolutionary aesthetics in literature and art (Ch. *geming wenyi* 革命文艺), featuring 'class struggle' (Ch. *jieji douzheng* 阶级斗争) and 'contrast between the old and the new' (Ch. *xinjiu duibi* 新旧对比) prevailing over all other themes.

During the 10-year Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), revolutionary model plays became the standard. As a result, traditional *lha mo* was replaced with "The [Legend of the] Red Lantern" (*hong dengji* 红灯记, T. *lgang zhu dmar po'i gtam rgyud*), significantly altering the aesthetic features and content of Tibetan performance. The impact of this revolutionary play on the whole of the Tibetan performing arts is significant. All styles created during that period were modelled on its performance techniques and revolutionary aesthetics. Arm and hand gestures, facial expressions, eye movements, and the expansive use of linear stage space, have left a trace that is still patent in current performance styles in Tibet.

At the end of the 1970s, under the 'Reform and Opening-up' campaign, Tibetan performing arts underwent a new period of development, during which national policies tolerated more diversity in the performing arts. A few years later, the advent of a State-led market economy allowed for performing arts to establish close ties with commercial ventures. Furthermore, the widespread use of new media such as cassettes, CDs or television, meant that other types of performances—both from the PRC and from abroad—have had an unprecedented impact on traditional performing arts. The emergence and circulation of contemporary pop music is an obvious example of cultural production in an era marked jointly by economic reform, new technology, and openness to outside influences with Chinese lyrics sung to Tibetan melodies, or Tibetan lyrics sung to pop tunes. During that period, the vast Tibetan rural areas, whether agricultural or pastoral, maintained their relatively traditional way of life. This social and cultural context was conducive to the sustenance of traditional performing arts. However, with the launch of first the PRC (2005), then the UNESCO (2009) Intangible Cultural Heritage projects, these traditional performing arts—still relatively confined to

rural areas—have once again become the focal point of nation-wide cultural policies. The considerable input of human (professional), material and financial resources, along with high visibility in the media, have suddenly made ‘intangible cultural heritage’ (Ch. *feiwuzhi wenhua yichan* 非物质文化遗产, Tib. *mngon med rig gnas shul shags*) a popular concept. As the core of the project, traditional performing arts face both opportunities and challenges in this new era.

3 – Overview of the Studies on Tibetan Performing Arts

Despite a long history of performing arts within Tibet, the academic study of performance by Tibetan scholars has started only recently. From a traditional scholarly point of view, in the Buddhist-based classification of ‘Sciences’ into five ‘Five Major Sciences’ (*rig gnas che ba lnga*) and ‘Five Minor Sciences’ (*rig gnas chung ba lnga*), one finds *zlos gar* (drama) among the latter, but this term is merely a conceptual translation from Indic sources, with no practical use among performers. In Tibetan history, very few works have offered an analysis of music. A relatively complete summary of theories about music started with Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (1182-1251)’s *Treatise on Music (rol mo’i bstan bcos)*. This opus discussed the creation, performance and the aesthetic standards of traditional Tibetan music, outlining, among other elements, melodies, lyrics and the rules for combining melodies and lyrics. In the 17th century, Regent (*sde srid*) Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705), in his *Feast for the eyes, the mind and the ears (Mig yid rna ba’i dga’ ston)*, documented the categorization, ancient musical notations, history and evolution of *gar*, a ceremonial style performed by a troupe of young boys for the Dalai Lamas. This work has become an indispensable resource on the formation and development of *gar* music. Besides these two important texts, many Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, from various sects, have also developed their specific ‘*cham yig*’, detailed ritual texts that include descriptions of monastic dance, including specific instructions for dance steps and body movements. Despite the plethora of literary production of Tibetans on other topics, performing arts have never been considered a worthwhile research subject in traditional Tibetan knowledge production.

One could argue that systematic interest in and research about Tibetan performing arts started in China in the 1930s. There have been three key periods of academic production. First, from the 1930s until the mid-1960s, the Gesar epic, *a lce lha mo* plays and music were the objects of publications in newspapers, magazines and other

written media. In the 1940s, magazines, such as *Frontier Affairs* (*bianzheng gonglun* 边政公论) and *Monthly Guide to Khams* (*kangdao yuekan* 康导月刊), included articles and photographic reports about the epic and drama plays from Khams, Eastern Tibet. Beginning in the late 1950s, several Chinese journalists and writers started conducting preliminary research on Tibetan traditional drama, songs and dances: noteworthy are Mao Jizeng (1959, 1960), Cai Donghua (1960), Yin Falu (1962), Tong Jinhua (1963) and Wang Yao (1963). Publications of this period were mostly produced by journalists and writers who could not speak Tibetan, who coined enduring Chinese terms for words belonging to the realm of Tibetan performing arts: 囊玛 (*nang ma*), 堆谐 (*duixie*, for *stod gzhas*), 朗萨姑娘 (*langsa guniang*, for *snang sa 'od-'bum*, the title and heroin of a *lha mo* play). The term 藏剧 (*zangju*), for Tibetan opera, was also coined then.³ The state-run Tibet Song and Dance Troupe (Ch. 西藏歌舞团, T. *bod ljongs glu gar tshogs pa*) was established at the beginning of 1960 in Lhasa. The troupe was divided into three sections, namely 'song and dance' (*glu gar*), 'drama' (*gtam brjod zlos gar*) and 'Tibetan Opera' (*lha mo*), which soon became independent work units. A number of party and government cadres, as well as new workers in 'literature and art' (Ch. *wenyi*), were dispatched to collaborate with the Troupe. Among them were Huang Wenhuan, Hu Jinan, Li Caisheng, Wu Zhaofeng, You Qingshu and Tang Jiafu. The troupe also included a group of Tibetan folk artists and Party-trained ethnic literature and art cadres.

After the founding of the Tibet Opera Troupe (Ch. *zangju tuan* 藏剧团, T. *bod ljongs lha mo tshogs pa*) around 1960, Bkra shis don grub, performer and former director of the famous pre-1950s Skyor mo lung troupe, became the director of the new Tibet Opera Troupe and Huang Wenhuan the deputy director. At the end of that same year, Bkra shis don grub was invited to participate in the Third Session of the National Congress of the Chinese Literature and Art Workers (Ch. *zhongguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe disanci daibiao dahui* 中国文学艺术工作者第三次代表大会), where he was elected member of the Standing Committee of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, as well as director of the China Theatre Association. He made a speech entitled "The Arrival of the Sunny Days" (风和日暖花重开). At the same Congress, the dancer Ngag dbang mkhas btsun made a

³ Note that, since the very end of the 1980s, *zangxi* (藏戏) has become the standard Chinese translation for all traditions of Tibetan opera in the PRC, and that *zangju* is infrequently used, except in the official name of the TAR Opera Troupe (*zangju tuan*).

speech entitled “Yesterday’s Slaves, Today’s Masters” (昔日的奴隶-今日的主人), marking the beginning of a new era for the content of Tibetan performing arts. From the mid-1960s until the early 1980s, hardly any research article was published on the Tibetan performing arts, due, among other factors, to the regulations on academic and artistic production enforced during the Cultural Revolution.

The most important period for studies of Tibetan performing arts began in the early 1980s. This period marked the beginning of articles and analyses put forward by Tibetan scholars, bilingual publications in both Tibetan and Chinese, and the emergence of an ‘insider’s perspective’, which differed both in its research angles and approaches from the previous ‘outsider’s perspective’. There has been cooperation and communication among researchers from perspectives, as well as disagreement, negotiation and mutual correction.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the contribution of Tibetan scholars was very significant. Despite their lack of academic training, they had a very solid foundation in literary Tibetan, had grown up in traditional Tibetan society before the 1950s, had been immersed in traditional culture and had accumulated experience and practice in that environment. Not only were these scholars committed to fairly representing the traditions that they knew,, more importantly, as ‘insiders’, they were familiar with those performing arts—they had even, to some extent, participated as performers in pre-1950s Tibet. Zhol khang bsod nams dar rgyas, for example, had played with the *nang ma’i skyid sdug*. As such, their voices were both authoritative and able to counter some of the inaccurate views expressed in the 1950s and 1960s by non-Tibetan scholars.

Taking advantage of this new historical period, with its rising interest and focus on traditional Tibetan performing arts, those Tibetan scholars resolutely decided to compose numerous articles covering the historical origin, evolution and artistic features of their traditional arts. For instance, someone like Blo bzang rdo rje (1923-1990) in his 1982 article⁴, corrected the view expressed by scholars since the 1960s, that a *lce lha mo* originated in monastic ‘*cham*. Another article by the same author (1988-a) thoroughly discussed the categories and symbolic meanings of the costumes and masks used in

⁴ For ease of reading, I have shortened the references in the text to a mention of the author and year of publication. The full references, including their translation in English, are found in the bibliography. When a Tibetan author has published in Tibetan, I have left his name transliterated in Wylie, followed by the year. When a Tibetan author has published in Chinese, I have indicated his name first in pinyin, then in Wylie transliteration in square brackets. I have separated publications in Tibetan and Chinese in the bibliography.

lha-mo. He also examined in detail (1988-b) the origin, development and evolution of the traditional Yoghurt Festival (*zho ston*) in Lhasa, featuring numerous *lha mo* performances, and its relation to Tibetan performing arts.

Zhol khang bsod nams dar rgyas (1922-2007) published the first articles of that period on *stod gzhas* and *nang ma* song styles, more precisely on the famed musician of the pre-1950s *nang ma'i skyid sdug* (nangma association) A jo rnam gyal who (1980); on the name and historical development of *stod gzhas* and *nang ma*, and their main artistic features (1984); or on the classification of melodies (1986). His most comprehensive work is his 1992 book titled *The Pure Traditions of Songs and Dances (Glu gar tshangs pa'i chabs rgyun)*, and he continued publishing research articles until 2003. Spen rdor (1932-2016) published an article (1986), in which he not only refuted and corrected earlier views on the origin of *lha mo* expressed by Tong Jinhua, Liu Zhiqun, Wang Yao, and He Qansan, but he also presented his own views on the topic. Hor khang bsod nams dpal 'bar (1919-1995) also published two noteworthy articles related to *lha mo*, on the genealogy of the plays and on the famed singer Mig dmar rgyal mtshan (see Hor khang 1989, 1991).

The aforementioned scholars are unique in the history of research on the Tibetan performing arts. Based on their personal knowledge and practice of those arts, they discussed in detail, in Tibetan language, the Tibetan performing arts' history, evolution and artistic features, positioning themselves within the Tibetan performing arts' own historical, cultural and linguistic context. Many of these articles were simultaneously translated into Chinese, providing basic academic information for later scholars writing in Tibetan and Chinese.

In 1986, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Bureau of Cultural Affairs (Ch. *wenhua ting* 文化厅) established the Tibet Ethnic Arts Research Institute (Ch. *xizang minzu yishu yanjiu suo* 西藏民族艺术研究所, T. *bod ljongs mi rigs sgyu rtsal zhib 'jug khang*), which is my work unit. In the same year, the Institute founded an academic journal in Chinese, initially intended for internal circulation, *Trends in arts research (yiyán dòngtài* 艺研动态). It later became the main research journal on performing arts in Tibet. Six issues were published between 1986 and 1988. From 1988 onwards, the Tibetan Arts Research Institute has been publishing the academic journal *Tibetan Arts Studies*. Its Chinese version (*xizang yishu yanjiu* 西藏艺术研究) is published quarterly, and its Tibetan version (*Bod ljongs sgyu rtsal zhib 'jug*) is published biannually. The articles are not translations: different articles appear in the Tibetan and in the Chinese journals.

The launch of these two journals has provided an important platform for Tibetan performing arts studies. To this day, these two have remained the only academic publications in the PRC dedicated to research on the Tibetan arts.

The Tibet Arts Research Institute was also founded to assist with the mission to compile the seven Anthologies⁵ that would come to be integrated in the massive compilation of the “Ten Great Works in Literature and Art” (*shida wenyi jicheng zhishu* 十大文艺集成志书).⁶ This has been a key national-level research project, which extended over a period of over ten years in other regions and over thirty years in Tibet. The Institute was thus divided and organized into music, dance, and drama editing sections, to implement the mission. Their task was to produce seven Anthologies devoted to folk songs, narrative singing (music), narrative singing (monograph), opera (music), opera (monograph), instrumental music and dance.⁷ This national project, along with the additional research work undertaken and achieved by the Tibetan Arts Research Institute, not only opened the door for the field of Tibetan performing arts studies, but also prompted the training of a number of scholars, whose research results have had an enormous influence on later scholarship. During that same period (1986-mid-1990s), other Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties outside the TAR have also implemented the same survey program in their respective jurisdictions, allowing researchers from different regions to communicate, exchange, and connect in their study of Tibetan performing arts. The editorial staff of the Tibetan Arts Research Institute also visited, during that period, all the townships and counties of the TAR to survey, collect, and organize materials related to the traditional performing arts. This led to the publication of several research articles during this period, by authors such as Dgra lha zla ba bzang po in Tibetan (1991-a, 1991-b) and, in Chinese, Gequ [Skal bzang chos rgyal] (1992), Bianduo [Spen rdor] (1993), Danzeng ciren [Bstan 'dzin tshe ring] (1988, 1990, 1991, 1996), who also dedicated some of his writing to traditional dances from different regions of Tibet (2014). Other researchers of that time include Wang Xihua (1943-2015) [Yon tshong Bsod nams tshe ring] (1987, 1993, 1996, 2005) and Suo ci (1945-2014) [Bsod tshe] (2006).

⁵ Beginning in 1981, each province, autonomous region and municipality of China had to compile its own volume of each one of these Anthologies.

⁶ For an analysis of the significance of these ten Anthologies across the whole of China, see Jones (2003).

⁷ These are the standard English translations of the topics of these Chinese Anthologies (see Jones, 2003, p. 292). For the remaining three Anthologies that completed the Ten Volumes, see *infra*, the compilation done by the Tibet Federation of Literature and Art.

Scholars from other work units (than the TAR Ethnic Arts Research Institute) also published important works, such as Tu ga [Thub dga'] & Li Guangde (1988), Tu ga [Thub dga'] (1990), dKon lo (1990), Da er ji [Dar rgyas] (1999), Pad ma rdo rje (1994), A lo Rin chen rgyal & rdo rje thar (1994, 1995), and Suo dai [Bsod te] (1995), to name but a few.

This was an active period for Tibetan performing arts studies, as the "Compilation of the Ten Great Works in Literature and Art" laid the ground for relatively comprehensive and in-depth field research. Many researchers have had access to firsthand materials that allowed them to write numerous introductory articles. In hindsight, one can only lament that these articles were mere introductions. Unlike those researchers active in the 1980s, researchers of this period received their artistic education, not in traditional Tibet, but in post-1950s music or dance academies in the PRC. This shaped their experience and understanding of artistic expression in Tibet. As such, they brought their personal visions and standards to bear upon their research. Most of them were not trained scholars: their level of writing was average, they were never trained in fieldwork techniques, and had to train themselves in all sorts of methods very quickly and simultaneously. Furthermore, the compilation of the "Ten Great Works of Literature and Art" imposed all across China a unified framework and categorization of the various art forms that were sometimes remote from local understandings.

During this period, the vast majority of Tibetan scholars started writing in Chinese, leading to the emergence of an abundant number of Chinese terms translated from Tibetan. Besides, starting from 1983, the Tibet Federation of Literature and Art (Ch. *xizang wen[xue yishu] jie lian [he hui]* 西藏自治区文学艺术界联合会) was assigned the task of compiling and organising the primary data for the remaining three Anthologies of the "Ten Great Works in Literature and Art": the volumes dedicated to folk stories, ballads, and proverbs. These three topics are related to performing arts, but in terms of research, they were attributed to a different work unit. As a consequence, to certain degree, the attention of those compilers has shifted to folk literature, and consequently, performance per se has lacked sufficient focus.

The Gesar Epic is the most representative piece of Tibetan oral performing arts. As such, it has been actively studied both at home and abroad. In the 1930s, Ren Naiqiang published "Records of Strange Kham" (*xikang guiyi lu* 西康诡异录) in *Sichuan Daily*, in which he refers to the epic as "The Barbarians' Three Kingdoms" (*man san guo* 蛮三国). Later, he further examined questions such as the origin of the Gesar Epic. After the 1950s, cultural offices in Qinghai province and other areas started surveying and collecting field data about the

epic, including analyses of its origin and geographical spreading, content, versions, number of episodes, etc.

The 1980s saw the peak of the Chinese translations of the Gesar Epic. Wang Yiyan translated a dozen episodes of the epic. In 1986, China's first study on the epic was published by Jianbian jiacuo ['Jam 'phel rgya mtsho] (1986). In the 1990s, studies on the epic reached further development, with more publications by Jianbian Jiacuo ['Jam 'phel rgya mtsho] (1994), Yang Enhong (1995), Spyod pa don grub and chab 'gag rta mgrin (1994), among others. Gesar studies have become a field of their own in the PRC, renamed 'Gesarology' (Ch. *gexue* 格学) in English-language pamphlets produced by various research institutes. An examination of the activities and evolution of these institutes reveals that most of their research has focused either on the compilation, analysis and interpretation of the literary aspect of the epic, or on the personal histories of Gesar bards. Especially popular is research on bards who recite the epic in an 'inspired' state, when the gods have descended upon them (*babs sgrung*). Nevertheless, these researchers have devoted little attention to the performative dimension of the epic as a storytelling event.

After 2000, academic studies on Tibetan performing arts in Tibet and China have witnessed more changes. First, scholars, that is, professors, as well as M.A. and Ph.D. graduates from different fields and academic institutions, replaced the former generation of researchers trained in Music or Dance Academies or Conservatories. Being academics trained in Chinese universities, the new generation of scholars brings a different lens, sets of assumptions, and diverging opinions about Tibetan performing arts. Most of these scholars, but far from all of them, are trained in arts departments of various universities. They try to expand the scope of research, away from a narrow focus on the intricacies of technical execution (in music or dance), and incorporate broader historical or cultural notions in their writing. Among these scholars, we can cite Gengdeng peijie [Dge 'dun 'phel rgyas](2003), Jue ga [Jo dkar](2005, 2007), Sangji dongzhi [Sang rgyas don grub] (2006, 2012), Jiayong qunpei ['Jam dbyang chos 'phel](2006, 2007), Dka' thub rgyal (2006), Wandai ji [Ban te skyid](2006), Geng deng pei jie [Dge 'dun 'phel rgyas](2009), Phun tshogs yon tan (2009), Qiangba qujie & Ciren langjie [Byang pa chos rgyal & Tshe ring nam rgyal](2011), Jia la [Rgyal lags](2012), Sgrol ma tshe ring (2012), Gesang qujie [Skal bzang chos rgyal](2015), Wanma jia & Jimao cuo [Pad ma rgyal & Lcags mo mtsho](2015), Cai bei [Tshe sbe] (2016) and Li Na [Klu mo mtsho] (2016) among others.

This current period, characterised by the input of professors and graduates from arts and other academic departments, has yielded more diversity, comprehensiveness and depth, in terms of both

research angle and scope, compared with the work of the 1990s, which was more introductory in nature. This is the first generation of 'academic' publications, but as far as academic discipline is concerned, these works hail predominantly from Art departments. Only a handful of this third generation of researchers come from non-artistic academic disciplines such as Tibetology or Anthropology. Their publications are mostly in Chinese, and work in Tibetan accounts for a small minority of the field.

4 – Opportunities and Challenges

The examination of the development of Tibetan performing arts studies shows that we are witnessing a special historical process. First, when the research started, it was a period during which the Tibetan social system was undergoing tremendous change. The social and cultural backgrounds of many performing artists were changing, and the writers or researchers were initially non-Tibetans. The fact that the studies of this period were conducted by 'others'—non-Tibetan authors—has made this era unique.

Second, from 1964 until the beginning of the 1980s, because of historical factors such as the Cultural Revolution, researchers lost the opportunity to physically access places where such arts had been performed before the onset of Maoism.

Third, since 1980, Tibetan scholars have started writing about Tibetan performing arts, an interest that was nearly absent in pre-1950s Tibet. Despite their knowledge and embodied experience of traditional Tibetan society and art, the impact of their work has unfortunately remained limited due to factors such as their lack of rigorous academic training, the small number of their publications and the fact that they wrote in Tibetan language, in a context of growing literacy in Chinese. As such, notwithstanding the value of their research—which ought to become the basis of the Tibetan performing arts studies on the whole—their work has not been able to draw sufficient attention from the later generations.

Fourth, after 1986, with the establishment of the "Compilation of Top Ten literary and artistic works" project and the establishment of the Tibetan Arts Research Institute, studies on Tibetan performing arts have shifted towards the categorization of different types of artistic traditions and the research on the arts themselves. Researchers during this period were mostly actors, players and teachers, who had received less academic than technical training. For instance, the Tibet volume of *The Anthology of China's Ethnic Folk Dances* (*Zhongguo minzu minjian wudao jicheng xizang juan* 中国民族民

间舞蹈集成—西藏卷) features very few cultural and historical explanations of the featured dances, but includes numerous drawings of specific dance postures. It is fair to say that apart from the researchers who drew these sketches themselves, the average academic reader can barely comprehend the movements, and despairs to know more about the social, cultural and linguistic contexts of these performances. As a matter of fact, research done by those scholars did yield considerable field data, but the published results unfortunately lack constructive content and potential for analytic discussion.

Fifth, since 2000, the researchers' profiles have shifted to being professional academics, professors and students from colleges and universities, mostly trained in Chinese. Comparatively speaking, while they have better academic training and general knowledge of the subject, the background of the vast majority of these researchers is anchored in music, dance, or drama, due to their specific training. As each discipline has its own priorities, there has been little interdisciplinary communication or cooperation. Disciplines other than music, dance and drama have considered performing arts studies irrelevant to their own fields.

Sixth, currently, the main language of publication in the field of Tibetan performance studies is Chinese. This writing practice entails the immediate translation of Tibetan concepts into Chinese, bypassing a useful discussion of the philological and historical dimensions of the Tibetan terminology. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, expressing oneself directly in Chinese entails that the writer uses Chinese concepts and categories to explain Tibetan realities on the ground. This can lead to confusion, especially for the younger Tibetan generations who may have never witnessed those traditions firsthand. If we add to this the widespread practice in China to copy convenient summaries that are readily available (on the web, for instance), we find ourselves in a situation where simplistic ideas and categories are amplified on a very large scale, acquiring through popularity a form of solidity that is difficult to debunk. In *lha mo* research, for example, we read everywhere that *lha mo* is a living fossil (Ch. *huohuashi* 活化石), that there are eight main librettos, that the purported founder Thang stong rgyal po trained seven 'sisters' (*spun bdun*, why female?), that there are two main traditions called the 'white mask' tradition' and the 'blue mask' tradition, or that drama was secularized at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. These assertions need careful revising.

Seventh, most studies on Tibetan performing arts tend to focus on 'traditional' performing arts, with little attention paid to contemporary genres, such as pop music, current dance shows or all

the creativity allowed by electronic media. There is not much history in researching modern performances in PRC universities, and, for the ethnic minority (Ch. *shaoshu minzu* 少数民族) regions, 'traditions' are more congruent with the State ideology and practice than modern expressions.

These are some of the most prominent problems faced in the study of Tibetan performing arts in the PRC. Are there ways to overcome these problems? Some inspiration may come from research experiences of Western scholars, including Tibetan scholars trained in the West. Western scholars started research on the Tibetan performing arts at the beginning of the 20th century, and so far they have focused on textual translation (of *lha mo* libretti, e.g.), monastic music, religious poetic 'songs' (*mgur glu*), 'cham, the Gesar epic, oral performances of storytelling, contemporary pop music, the performative aspects of a *lce lha mo*, and so on.⁸ These studies stem from Buddhist studies, Tibetology, Anthropology, Comparative Literature, Ethnomusicology, and Ethnochoreology, among others. The diversity in both their research scope and professional fields has allowed Western scholars to focus on the interconnection between performing arts and history, culture, society, religion, politics and economics. On the whole, their approach has tried to understand the performing arts *in context*, rather than *out of context*. This approach is what Tibetan performing arts studies in Tibet have lost or are currently lacking.

After 30 years, the compilation of the "Ten Great Works in Literature and Art" in Tibet finally came to an end in 2016. Since 2005, the Chinese government has initiated work on heritage and the protection of oral and intangible cultural heritage, investing abundant financial resources and manpower in this project. Traditional performing arts have once again become the focus of media and academia. At this historical juncture, where opportunities and challenges intersect, where should Tibetan performing arts studies go? I think taking an anthropological approach may be a good option.

Since the 1950s, academic disciplines such as Ethnomusicology and the Anthropology of music have emerged as a response to previous musical research that, under the influence of the Industrial Revolution in Europe in the 19th century, took music and dance as two distinct research subjects. Those previous studies had moreover focused solely on European classic music and as such had completely

⁸ See Henrion-Dourcy's « Bibliographic Introduction (1986-2017) » to this issue for a comprehensive survey of research produced in Western languages in these various fields over the last 30 years.

neglected folk music. In 1964, Alan Merriam, member of the Society for Ethnomusicology, published *The Anthropology of Music* (Merriam 1964), where he argued that the study of music must have an anthropological basis, and that ethnomusicologists should not only study sound, but also the broad background within which sounds are found. In 1977, Anya Peterson Royce published *The Anthropology of Dance*. Following some of Merriam's ideas and methods, she argued that studies on dance should not be limited to movement, but should also enquire on cultural concepts related to human motion, which requires long-term field research.

Since the 1980s, the focus of anthropology has seen a significant change, namely from structure to process, from technique to performance, from the logic of the social and cultural systems to the dialectical relationship between social and cultural processes (Turner, 1988). It is this dialectical relationship that I am hoping to see emerge in Tibetan performance studies. Building on Singer Milton's (1972) notion of 'cultural performance', Turner emphasized the 'reflexivity' of performance, that is, the relationship between everyday social processes and cultural displays, which is dialectical and speculative (Turner 1979).

Turner challenged Western society's perception that arts are superfluous, useless or meaningless, set apart from 'more significant' social processes. Instead, he stressed that, in order to truly understand the artistic work of a given time, it is necessary to contextualize it in the society, as well as in the culture and beliefs of the time and people. Turner has not only provided a novel vision to scholars studying drama, but has also opened a new area for anthropologists to examine social and cultural life.

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Lyrics Matter: Reconsidering Agency in the Discourses and Practices of Tibetan Pop Music among Tibetan Refugees¹

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I aim to reflect on the social and cultural changes in Tibetan refugee societies in India and Nepal by focusing on the practices of singers and audiences. Special attention will be devoted to the lyrics of Tibetan pop music prevalent in Dharamsala and Kathmandu. I shall focus on the current situation and countermeasures against the declining Tibetan literacy in refugee societies. For a long time, there has been a pressure within refugee societies to preserve Tibetan culture and language. In this paper, I will consider how Tibetan pop engages with lyrics to promote that preservation. I will also look into how new music media play a crucial role in those changes.

Recently, among Tibetan refugees, audiences have exerted an influence on pop song creation. Singers create products that meet with the demands of the audience in order to both earn a living and gain fame. What I aim to look at in this paper is the unexpected consequences of the singers' creativity, more precisely their agency.² Moreover, the new refugees' insistence on the cultural authenticity of Tibetan pop lyrics can also be considered as a way to exercise agency. These are connected and they form the current context of Tibetan pop. This context is of course not unrelated to the problems faced by refugee societies in Dharamsala and Kathmandu and agency is

¹ This paper is a revised and enlarged version of an article originally published in Japanese in the *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* entitled "Katachi wo kaeteiku Kashi: Tibet Nanmin Shakai niokeru Tibetan Pop no Sakushi Jissen wo Jireini" (The Changing form of Lyrics: A Case Study of Lyric Writing Practice by Tibetan Pop Singers in Tibetan Refugee Society, Vol. 40, no. 2, 2015, pp. 311-347). I am thankful to the National Museum of Ethnology (Osaka) for granting permission to reprint the original paper and allowing the current additions.

² The term "agency" refers to "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn 2010: 28), given to subjects and groups.

certainly not a sufficient concept to account for all that they are going through.

2. Previous studies

Tibetan pop is influenced by Western pop genres, Indian film music, and Nepalese folk songs and pop music, particularly since the 1980s. Normally the songs classified as 'Tibetan pop' are sung in Tibetan. However, sometimes songs sung by non-Tibetans are also considered as Tibetan pop and conversely, Tibetan pop does not always include songs sung by Tibetans. The lyrics of Tibetan songs are not always in Tibetan. Hindi, Nepali, English and Chinese are used, depending on the context. Making Tibetan pop pertains to a larger context, the preservation of Tibetan culture in exile, sometimes conceptually referred to as the "Shangri-la-ization of pre-1950s Tibet" (Swank 2014, p. 5). Keila Diehl is a well-known researcher on Tibetan pop and the discussion in this paper heavily relies on her analysis. She was involved in creating Tibetan pop herself. She and other researchers have pointed out that the preservation of Tibetan language has been one of the most pressing issues in exile (Ardley 2002; Diehl 2004; Stirr 2008; Swank 2014). This affects the overall daily work of Tibetan refugees and more specifically, within the scope of this paper, the production of music. This manifests, for example, in being conspicuously careful about grammatical terms, pronunciation, and accuracy in the use of Tibetan language.

However, the context of Tibetan pop between the 1990s, when Diehl conducted her research, and the present situation has changed tremendously. The number of singers who engage in Tibetan pop has been increasing since the 2000s, whereas socially accepted singers were less than ten in the 1990s. The tastes of the audience have been changing and technical developments have supported and contributed significantly to the development of Tibetan pop in recent years. Singers have started facing the competition to attract the audience and become more popular than others in the small market in refugee societies. As a result, Tibetan pop has changed from a seller's to a buyer's market, as the singers need to meet their audience's demands to be accepted. The influence of the audience on the singers is much greater than in the 1990s, when the singers relatively freely conducted their musical activities.

The lyrical content of pop songs has also undergone a transition since the work Diehl conducted in the 1990s. Diehl presented "the freedom struggle, rigorous Red China-bashing, and nostalgic recalling of the solemn past (the golden era of the three ancestral

spiritual kings)" as the thematic foundation of the lyrics of Tibetan pop and she identified Tibetan pop as "modern Tibetan songs deriving their inspiration from the patriotic sentiments of Tibetans [which], in turn, often confirm and augment those same sentiments in performance, thereby strengthening the community's shared memories and goals" (Diehl 2002, p. 222). Writing in the late 2000s, Stirr adds nuance to Diehl's argument, but continues to focus her attention on Tibetan pop's ability to express nationalism. She analyzed 'Blue Lake' (*mtsho sngon po*), a song that skillfully expressed nationalism for those both in the homeland and in exile, discussed the diversity of interpretations of the lyrics and images, as well as how Tibetan pop music relates to Tibetan national identity.³ The diversity of interpretations does not impair Tibetan unity and eventually it contributes to the creation of self-reflections concerning identity among people (Stirr 2008). Stirr's argument, focusing on how interpretations are produced, or even constrained, in context, referring to the diversity of open interpretations, adopts a stimulating viewpoint in the progress of Tibetan pop research.

However, as I will try to show in this paper, the current situation surrounding the production and consumption of Tibetan pop does not necessarily entail focusing the discussion on the nationalistic features of the lyrics. For instance, the framework of interpretation diversity, as proposed by Stirr, does not take into account the thoughts of the singers who aim to contribute to the Tibetan refugee society, how they are received by the audience and how they reflect the social situation. Listening to Tibetan pop is not necessarily reproducing Tibetan identity in a progressive manner. First, while the social meaning of music is defined by the context in which people live, there are as many interpretations as the number of listeners and as the same person repeatedly listens to the same song, different interpretations can emerge. Interpretation is constantly exposed to the possibility of change. In this process, the meaning of music and lyrics is constrained by the context of the music industry and changes in technology. The position and meaning of music in society go far beyond the singers' beliefs or lyrics. This point of course also applies to research in other fields. In popular music studies or even in anthropology, there is a tendency to associate musical activities with the creation and maintenance of identity, or with resistance to hegemony (e.g. Peggie 2006; Biddle and Knight 2007). However,

³ "Acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives may not dissolve the fantasy of a unifying, essential Tibetan identity or replace it with anything 'better', but it may lead someone to ask the question: what work does this identity do, and why is it important?" (Stirr 2008, p. 329) .

making, and listening to music involves unintended events, beyond an intended oppositional stance given to music by singers. This paper will try to account for this underresearched dimension.

Furthermore, as the discussion here focuses on the practice of lyric writing, let us quickly review previous studies discussing the pros and cons of lyric analysis. Frith (1988) was critical about the method of popular music studies, which he found too biased towards the analysis of lyrics. Many studies are critical of research centered on lyric analysis (e.g. Moore 2004; Longhurst 2007; Brabazon 2012). In fact, popular music studies with strong ties to cultural studies tended to overvalue lyric analysis and to overinterpret the meaning of those lyrics as political resistance. As a result, analyzing the complex environment of popular music consisting of music producers, audiences and industries has been disregarded (Longhurst 2007, p. 158). Keeping in mind the recent discussions that have refined Frith's criticism of lyric-centric analysis and shifting the focus over to the singers and the audience, this paper may appear to be a sort of regression. However, the lyric analysis in this paper differs greatly from lyric analysis of older research. The latter interprets the meaning from what is written, and considers it as a 'text' suitable for reading. It talks about power and resistance, but in many cases, the production practices of popular music are disregarded; it in fact positions the lyrics outside the social web of power relationships. In this paper, I will attempt to analyze the practice of writing lyrics by focusing on the transformation of lyrics writing practices and and I will try to position Tibetan pop within social power relations and worldwide technological innovations. I would like to propose in this paper that lyric analysis is an effective tool in studying the relationship between popular music and society, or the context of popular music.

In addition, in order to clarify the argument, I will also need to look at how popular music studies looks at the audience. Since the 1990s, the audience has been positively positioned as an entity that reads and consumes texts of popular music creatively and actively, especially since the spread of electronic media (Thornton 1995; Cavicci 1998; DeNora 2000; Kusek & Leonhard 2005; Longhurst 2007; Brabazon 2012). The role played by the audience is definitely important in the production of popular music. Besides, as discussed by Finnegan (1989) and Cohen (1992), musicians not only produce music but also consume it. Like the audience, they are positioned in a reciprocating movement of consuming other artists' work. Therefore, it is clear that viewing the singers' role as merely offering music to the audience in a one-sided manner does not hold: the audience is

producing something in return, and creative activities are enmeshed in a complex web of relations.

In this way, the trend of praising active and creative audiences, who favor experimental and collaborative music, shows certain affinities with the discussion about agency in cultural anthropology (e.g. Ahearn 2010; Madhok 2013; Ortner 2006), because this trend emphasises action in the social and cultural dynamics. Although this paper largely follows the above-mentioned studies, I think that we need to reconsider the validity of praising the audience and musicians, without a deeper consideration. If popular music is created in the constraints of its context, the practice of consuming is also context-dependent and reflexive. As will be described later, from the mid 2000s, when technological innovation brought a great blow to the singers, the audience of Tibetan pop came to influence the lyrics written by the singers. Also, the singers want to secure an audience by consciously creating lyrics that the audience desires. This is linked to changes in the cultural context of the refugee society. In the case of Tibetan refugees, we cannot make this simple commendation of audiences, because the transformations in lyric-writing has further heightened the differences and divisions between the 'new refugees' (*gsar 'byor*) and the 'settled' or old refugees (*gzhis chags*). Some singers play a major role in the transformation of these writing practices, and their comments can be negative. So we need to position them back into their social situation to make sense of their opinions and practices. But first, I will outline the major characteristics of Tibetan refugee society.

3. *An outline of Tibetan refugee society*

As a result of the 14th Dalai Lama's exile to India in 1959, Tibetans from the three regions (*chol kha gsum*), consisting of Amdo (*a mdo*), Kham (*kham*s) and Ü-Tsang (*dbus gtsang*) fled as refugees to countries neighboring Tibet, such as India, Nepal, Bhutan and later to various Western countries. According to the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA 2010), as of 2010, there are 127,935 Tibetan refugees, among whom 94,203, the majority, reside in India, followed by 13,514 people living in Nepal. Moreover, since 1992, the number of migrants to the United States has increased and now 9,135 people live there, in what has become the third largest Tibetan settlement after Nepal. The cultural environment of Tibetan refugees has thus greatly changed.

Since the exile of Dalai Lama, the CTA, setting him as the leader, has ascribed to Tibetan refugees the role of embodying Tibetan culture before the 1950s. There was a provision that the culture of the

refugee society was authentic and Tibetan culture was destroyed under China's rule. The pre-1950s Tibetan culture in refugee society has been positioned as the root of Tibetan nationalism and identity (Calkowski 1997; Diehl 2002; Dreyfus 2002; Lau 2009 etc.). Buddhism has been established as the root of Tibetan culture protected by the refugee society and until now Tibetan culture has been protected and transmitted with support from overseas. At the same time, the Tibetan refugees have actively adapted to perceived images of themselves from Western countries. In other words, for a good identity formation as Tibetan refugees, the Western gaze, good or bad, was indispensable (Anand 2007; Moran 2004; Prost 2006).

However, exile nationalism based on culture brought about an unexpected side-effect. People in the refugee societies explicitly downplayed the culture presented by 'new refugees', who came from Tibet after the 1990s, as 'sinicized Tibetan culture' (Diehl 2002; Yamamoto 2013). These policies have become a major factor of conflict between new and settled refugees.

Since it values authentic Tibetan culture from before the 1950s, social and cultural transformation should be avoided as much as possible in refugee society. To accomplish this objective, each Tibetan refugee is supposed to be responsible for preserving and spreading the 'true' Tibetan culture, asserting that individual actions are directly linked to social situations. The ideal is to engage in a career that contributes to the CTA and Tibetan refugee society; occupations such as CTA staff and teachers are socially valued. Refusing change in the name of tradition has created an ideology that criticizes young people's new activities and denies them legitimacy (Diehl 2002; Harris 1999; Lau 2009). Although this rigid discourse has tended to decline in recent years, people's creative activities were largely restricted until the 1990s. However, viewpoints linking individual practices and social consequences in a causal relationship still have great power, as far as I have heard in my research.

As mentioned earlier, language preservation was one of the focal points of preserving pre-1950s Tibetan culture. As can be seen from the CTA's assertion that the educational opportunities are deprived in the homeland (Tibet) and that Tibetan language is being suppressed, the exile linguistic consciousness is extremely strong and preserving the language properly has been said to be a political act (Diehl 2002). For instance, it encourages people to speak Tibetan

⁴ See, for example, Swank's (2014) discussion on the discourse of "contribution" to the refugee society (*shapshu/ zhabs zhu*) and that of "enjoyment of personal leisure" (*kyamkyam/ kyam kyam*).

correctly in both grammar and pronunciation, and if one speaks odd Tibetan, that person will be ridiculed behind their back.⁵

However, despite the atmosphere and high demands placed on the Tibetan language among refugees, schools emphasize modern science and English education to adapt to the times. They use English as a medium in many classes, for example in history. As young people “frequently use Indian and English loanwords” (Bangsbo 2008, p. 205), it is extremely difficult to find anyone who speaks only in Tibetan. In addition, the constraints of a competitive job market for the younger generation cause them to use less Tibetan. In the past young people found work as school teachers or officials in the CTA. However, in recent years, Tibetan refugee society has not been able to adequately absorb young people into the labor force (Bangsbo 2009, p. 206; Swank 2014, p. 84-85). Therefore, the places where Tibetan young people who graduated from university turn to look for employment are Indian companies and foreign-affiliated companies, where they have to compete side-by-side with Indians. Thus, “the Tibetan language is in the process of becoming devalued” (Bangsbo 2008, p. 205) and Hindi and English are becoming more important.

Also, contrary to the policy of emphasizing the conservation of the Tibetan language, the refugee schools did not emphasize the reading and writing of the Tibetan language and did not firmly incorporate those skills into education until 1995 (Bangsbo 2008, p. 201).⁶ Originally, reading and writing in Tibetan was limited to aristocratic classes and monks and it is said that the literacy rate of the general people was low. This tendency was also the case in the refugee society. The importance of literacy in Tibetan has not been appreciated enough. It resulted in many people being illiterate in Tibetan. For instance, Diehl wrote “the written Tibetan word is still confined to government offices, schoolbooks, and monasteries in this refugee community” (Diehl 2002, p. 213).

However, in 1999, under the name of the ‘Tibetanization Program’, the CTA reviewed the education system and promoted reading and writing in Tibetan (Swank 2014, p. 27).⁷ Also due to the uprisings in Lhasa and other areas of Tibet in 2008 and the wave of

⁵ For instance, residents of Dharamsala frequently accuse the Sikkimese of speaking Tibetan effeminately.

⁶ According to Swank, the decline of literacy in refugee society had been a problem since 1986. However Tibetan textbooks began to be used in some schools including Tibetan Children Villages (TCV) under the CTA control and by 1991, 14 kinds of text books on various topics were used in the classrooms (Swank 2014, p. 27).

⁷ Diehl suggests that the CTA started a mail service in 2001 to encourage reading and writing in Tibetan and that it was linked to the improvement of a consciousness for language preservation (Diehl 2002, p. 213).

recent self-immolations, a number of language preservation projects have emerged in and outside Tibet. Since 2012, every Wednesday (*lha dkar*) is regarded as the day of encouraging Tibetan culture. The ‘Speak pure Tibetan’ (*bod skad gtsang ma shod*) directive has also become popular and has been thoroughly practiced at schools in exile (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Campaign card “Speak pure Tibetan (*bod skad gtsang ma shod dang*)”

While Tibetan language education is provided in schools, competence in Tibetan language is not always acquired via traditional education. ‘Literacy’, in this paper refers to the ability to read/listen and compose in Tibetan. This definition of literacy does not take into account the importance of synonyms (*mngon brjod*), poetic expressions (*snyan ngag*), and training for reading comprehension. The first generation of refugees, who could not read or write Tibetan, communicated almost exclusively in Tibetan. Because they were not able to write, they memorized esoteric phrases, endowing them with a certain degree of literary Tibetan comprehension (Diehl 2002, p. 213). In contrast, current young people are mandated to acquire Tibetan reading and writing skills at school, but they do not enjoy the same contact with the language, as did the first generation. Some say that the current refugees have a literacy rate of almost 100 percent (Bangsbo 2008, p. 201).⁸ According to Swank’s paper, “Over 60% of

⁸ According to Swank’s survey (no date given), the Tibetan literacy rate was more than 40 percent for Tibetans in their 20s and less than 70 percent for Tibetans in their 30s (Swank 2014, p. 29). Diehl also said “Most Tibetan refugees over the age of forty-five are illiterate” (Diehl 2002, p. 213). Therefore, it seems that Bangsbo’s 100 percent literacy rate is unrealistic.

individuals in the 30-39 age group reported that they most frequently write in Tibetan. However, only about 40% of those in the youngest age group gave the same answer, instead giving English as their preferred written language" (Swank 2014, p. 29). In Swank's ethnography, the young Tibetan refugees born and raised in India are preferentially writing in English and from my own research experience, people born in India take notes and write in English. In this regard, it can be said that the ability to write and read complex expressions in Tibetan is declining. At present, it appears that the positions requiring full Tibetan writing skills, such as at the CTA, higher education institutions and NGOs, are filled with 'new-comers' native from Tibet, whereas only a few people born in exile can work in those positions.⁹

Tibetan pop has gradually developed not only in a context of tradition-centred ideology but also, especially since the late 1990s, in a cultural environment in which English and Hindi are increasingly popular. So pop music has become one important Tibetan-language media used by artists to relate to local Tibetan audiences (Diehl 2002). With the emphasis on individual responsibility for the preservation of culture and identity, Tibetan pop singers also strive to contribute to their refugee society. For instance, Kelsang Kes told me: "What we are doing is not just enjoying ourselves and entertaining the audience, but we are also protecting the Tibetan culture. Tibetan pop is a fine Tibetan culture and it also contributes to the creation of people's unity".¹⁰ In the face of the struggles prevalent in Tibet, such as self-immolations, singers are actively involved in documenting and raising the issues. They hold performances to raise consciousness and release music related to these incidents.¹¹ In 2012 when the Tibetan Singers Union hosted a debate linking their music activities to political issues such as self-immolations in Tibet, the CTA permitted these activities including their musical performances on stages as contributing to the spread of Tibetan culture. This means that singers trying to spread a new Tibetan culture have been recognized as being integrated with the government's promoted cultural policy. Their activities got the seal of the CTA, so they were

⁹ Looking at the data explicitly described in Swank's book, almost all new refugees were recorded and spoke in Tibetan (Swank 2014, pp. 143-155), whereas settled refugees of the same age were recorded and spoke in English.

¹⁰ Interview, 6 September 2013.

¹¹ There may be a chance of misjudging the situation if reading only the political meaning in such involvement. For example, the debut song of a singer was about immolation. However, he told me that "It was easy to gather the audience's attention if I was singing a political theme that matched the concerns of the time" (name withheld).

able to resume performance activities from which they were previously requested to refrain.

4. History of Tibetan pop

I will now briefly look back at the history of Tibetan pop, reviewing the extant literature in light of my fieldwork¹². Although “not long after 1959, new Tibetan songs lamenting the experience of exile, praising the Dalai Lama, and reminiscing about the landscape of the homeland began to circulate throughout the communities of exiled Tibetans” (Diehl 2004, p. 9), it is generally said the history of Tibetan pop started in the 1970s. In the 1970s, Western pop had arrived in the refugee society and it had an influence on music listening habits (Diehl 2004, p. 9). However Tibetan refugees did not create new music by themselves because of the tradition-centred ideology and the lack of equipment to create, play and record music by themselves. Accordingly, modern music (*deng dus gzhas*)¹³ sung in Tibetan was introduced in the refugee societies in India, Nepal, and especially in Dharamsala for the first time from the outside.

According to Diehl’s summary (Diehl 2002, pp. 178-186), modern Tibetan music was first introduced into the refugee society in Dharamsala when Tibetan refugee students came back from a study trip to Norway (or Japan).¹⁴ The students created a song called ‘my dearest Lhamo’ (*nga’i btse ba’i lha mo*) for the Dharamsala audience. It was well received and became legendary. During the same period, people started creating and arranging music by themselves. It started with members of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA), an institution affiliated with the CTA. As with ‘My dearest Lhamo’, these songs met with applause and acceptance. Among the songs, ‘This land is our land’ (*pha yul ‘di nga tsho tshang ma’i red*) adapted from an English song by Jamyang Norbu, then director of TIPA, is still being taught in refugee schools. It was in the same period that a song called ‘Beautiful Rinzin Wangmo’ (*mdzes ba’i rig ‘dzin dbang mo*) was introduced. That was the first instance of modern music created in the refugee society.

¹² I conducted research in Dharamsala for six months in 2012 and 2013, and in Kathmandu for two months in 2012 and 2013.

¹³ The contemporary music mentioned here is contrasted with the traditional music (*gna’ snga mo’i gzhas*) in Tibetan refugee society and it is defined in the relative position to the tradition (= ‘Shangri-Laized Tibetan culture before 1950’).

¹⁴ Descriptions such as year of publication are based on the description of Diehl (2002).

In the 1980s, some western Buddhist bands such as the 'Dharma Bums' began full-fledged activities in Dharamsala. Contrasting with traditional music, they played rock music with political lyrics. Through them, Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala were able to directly experience contemporary music. Furthermore, in 1985, the influential 'Trinkhor' (*drin 'khor*), a Tibetan band from Switzerland, released a cassette and a new genre of contemporary music was born among Tibetans. Trinkhor is still popular today, and it exerted a big influence in India and Nepal.

In the same year, bands creating and playing contemporary music also appeared in India and Nepal. 'Rangzen Shönu' (Freedom Youth), a three-man-group originating from Darjeeling but living in Dharamsala, released an cassette also titled 'Rangzen Shönu'. They started a division of labour system still adopted by singers and groups today, that is, requesting high lamas (in Darjeeling in their case) to write the lyrics. Their work also had a major influence in Tibet: Dadön, one of the very first pop singers in Tibet, mentioned this band in an interview about her Lhasa years (Henrion-Dourcy 2005, p. 236).

After the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, TIPA released albums greatly influenced by European and American popular music under the name of 'Tibetan songs'. The predecessor of the band the 'Aa-Ka-Ma' (a representative presence in Tibetan refugee societies until around 2005) was playing on these albums. Aa-Ka-Ma was trying to find ways to perform contemporary music while using traditional Tibetan music elements such as instruments and singing styles.

In 1995, two of Tibetan refugee society's most significant works were released¹⁵. One was 'Rangzen' (Freedom) from the 'Yak Band' (*g.yag kyi rol tshogs*) to which Diehl belonged; and the other was the debut album 'Modern Tibetan Songs', from Aa-Ka-Ma. According to Diehl, both albums can be considered 'rock and roll'. It can be said that these two albums have fashioned the music scene of the present refugee society to a certain extent. Although the Yak Band was disbanded after this one album, the Aa-Ka-Ma band released seven albums, roughly every other year until 2006.

Meanwhile, Tibetan pop moved away from group performance and toward individual artists. For example Tsering Gyurmey (Figure 2) who temporarily played at TIPA and Phurbu. T. Namgyal, who started his career when he was in the TCV and now is based in the US, have become stars representing the Tibetan pop world. The

¹⁵ Diehl (2004: 10) writes that it was the end of 1994, but my research indicates a little later.

nature of their music is popular music with a strong dance color, and performed in a karaoke style singing over a recorded sound source, rather than the live instrumentation of 'Aa-Ka-Ma' or the 'Yak Band'. Many singers have since then adopted the performance technique of Tsering Gyurme and Phurbu T. Namgyal.



(Figure 2) Tsering Gyurmey a.k.a the King of Tibetan pop

In the 2000s, as the number of singers increased, the genre range expanded and the quality of the music improved. In particular, Tenzin Woser debuted in 2001, Pemsu made his debut in 2004 and became a R&B singer representing the Tibetan pop world, Kunga Tenzin made his debut in 2005, Choedak [Choedak Lobsang] made his debut in 2007 (Figure 3) and Kelsang Kes made his debut in 2012. These artists are leading the next generation.



(Figure 3) Next generation Tibetan Pop star, Lobsang Delek

5. The *shifting context of Tibetan pop*

The history of Tibetan pop is inseparable from the evolution of production methods and changes in the socio-cultural context. In the 1990s, most Tibetan pop music was composed by the singers and the lyrics were written by masters of literary and metaphorical expressions, such as lamas and highly educated lay people, who usually were not involved in music. The reason why the lyrics were outsourced in this manner was because of consideration for accurate Tibetan expression, in addition to the problem of illiteracy of the singers (Diehl 2002). Here, I would like to quote the lyrics of 'Friendship song', written by the lay doctor and scholar Jampa Gyaltzen Dakton for Aa-Ka-Ma in the 1990s, from Diehl's work.

Friendship song (Lyrics : Jampa Gyaltzen Dakton)

Little jolmo bird in the willow grove
 With a sweet-sounding voice,
 Please think deeply.
 I wonder if it is really as it seems.

Little fish belonging to the Turquoise Lake
 With golden eyes,
 You are flexing to please me
 Is it really true?

Little bird in the willow grove
 If you really want to stay here,
 I will certainly allow you, bird of the willow garden,
 To be its owner

Fish with golden eyes and quick movements
 If you really want to go to the lake,
 Of course, I will take care of you.¹⁶

As we can see, the lyrics requested by singers to Dakton are close to traditional Tibetan poetry. Grammatical accuracy, and rich poetic metaphors are deployed, requiring the listeners to use their imagination. Today, those who are able to understand the meaning of lyrics written at that time are very limited. A former monk (aged 26)

¹⁶ Diehl (2002, p. 208).

said about these lyrics “It is too difficult to understand what the singer is saying. It feels like reading a *sutra*”.¹⁷

In addition to outsourcing lyrics, Tsering Gyurmey used lyrics and textbooks from Tibet. Tsering Gyurmey said that these lyrics contained life lessons and educational meanings, and that they were high quality. Many Tibetan pop lyrics in the 1990s came from either outsourcing or borrowing from existing sources.

Although CDs are commonly distributed among Tibetan refugees today, the music media in the 1990s were cassette tapes. Tsering Gyurmey recalls that the new albums were released on the Dalai Lama’s birthday, during Buddhist prayer rituals and during the Tibetan New Year. This is when many people purchased them. Tibetan pop was an important entertainment for consumers in the 1990s, when there was not much entertainment available, contrary to the present. Although the spread of cassette tapes simultaneously brought pirated products into the market, the damage was relatively small compared to the present. Singers were able to earn money by selling their genuine copies.

In the 2000s, the situation of Tibetan pop changed greatly. Cassettes tapes began to fall out of favour. CDs became popular and then MP3 appeared and completely occupied the market. The appearance of CDs and MP3 was very significant for the singers. If you had a computer with a drive to read CDs, it was possible for anyone to infinitely reproduce sound data without any deterioration in sound quality. Pirated cassette tapes had required special equipment, which was difficult to get, and the outcome was a deteriorated sound quality. But as MP3 players and mobile phones with built-in MP3 functions became popular, illegal exchange between friends and acquaintances spread. Depending on the popularity of the singers, especially after 2006, this pirating technology had a great impact on artists’ livelihoods. For example, I asked 18 students and young people in Dharamsala and Kathmandu whether they purchased Tibetan pop CDs. They said that “My friends got the music as electronic data, and I did not buy a CD”, “I got the data from a store on my mobile phone, it is cheaper than buying a CD”. None of them bought CDs. One of my friends saved his favorite songs to a USB flashdrive and distributed the data to his friends.

As of 2014, personal internet was not yet well developed in Dharamsala and Kathmandu, except for those who operated cyber-café. The number of personal computers owned by individuals was larger than ever, but given the fact that most people are not aware of

¹⁷ Informal conversation, 28 September 2011.

the transfer system, exchanging data using P2P and free download sites was not a big problem for the singers. However, illegal copying of CDs between friends and illegal sale of MP3 data by cyber cafés and mobile phone distributors had become a big issue. According to the singers, despite the fact that the audiences increase, sales of CDs has been decreasing. Listeners do not translate into buyers. As a result, current singers cannot support themselves with CD sales.

At the same time, from the 2000s, Tibetan pop from Tibet has flowed into exile in large quantities, in the form of pirated products and illegal copies. They are listened to especially by 'new refugees'. Since these productions are also exchanged between people as MP3 data, their circulation in exile has not benefitted the singers back in Tibet, but in exile, it has constituted a source of competition for refugee singers, making the range of exile pop singers seem narrow, inferior. It can be said that the singers have been plagued by the free trade of the data resulting from the changes in media technology, prompting them to change their position about CDs.

As Choedak said, "CDs are like a business card. There is no profit with this. The important thing is the income from the performances."¹⁸ The place to earn money has shifted to performances, and CDs are made only to entice people to attend performances. Singers then listen to the audience's opinions more actively than ever before in order to entice more people to the performances. It is now in lyric practice that the effort is noticeable and those changes are not small. For instance, in Dharamsala in 2005, I heard a voice saying "The 'JJI band'¹⁹ are good because they sing in colloquial Tibetan and they are easy to understand. The lyrics of the other bands are literary and I sometimes don't know what they are singing about",²⁰ Or, "What is important in Tibetan music is lyrics, there is no point if we do not understand. Singers should create lyrics we understand, then we listen to them."²¹ In order to capture a young Tibetan pop audience, one who listens to a wide spectrum of music through various media such as television and the internet, singers changed their practices of lyric-writing according to the audience's demand. For example, Choedak told me, "I try to write easy-to-understand colloquial lyrics for the audience, because they do not

¹⁸ Interview, 12 February 2012.

¹⁹ A three-member-band who has been active in Dharamsala and have been highly appreciated by overseas tourists in recent years.

²⁰ Informal conversation with a man born in India (aged of 25), 3 September 2005.

²¹ Informal conversation with a woman born in India (aged of 31), 29 September 2011. Also see Stirr's case related to the understanding of lyrics (Stirr 2008, p. 321, p. 325).

show their interest if the lyrics are difficult.”²² In the following example, we can read the lyrics of ‘Jewel in my heart’, written in 2012 by Kelsang Kes, a contemporary of Choedak.²³

Jewel in my heart (*sems nang gi nor bu*, Lyrics: Kelsang Kes)²⁴

Jewel in my heart, the root guru, the wish-fulfilling jewel
Is him. I take refuge.

My root guru with kindness and compassion
For all Tibetans in Tibet and outside,
He works hard day and night.
In the Root guru, I take refuge.

Jewel in my heart, the Dalai Lama,
I remember his grace. I take refuge.

Jewel in my heart, the root guru, the wish-fulfilling jewel
Is him. I take refuge.

I hope your activities be widespread
Long live for one hundred aeon
The place of refuge in this life and beyond,
I take refuge.

Direct and colloquial expressions are used for the lyrics of this song showing reverence for the Dalai Lama. This song was well received and helped shape the current popularity of this singer. It is interesting to note that, before that song, when he was composing songs for his debut album, Kelsang Kes received lyrics from the head of a monastery. Those lyrics were full of literary expressions; considerable cultural knowledge was necessary to understand them. Although Kelsang Kes, who was a thangka teacher at a monastery, had relatively high literary Tibetan skills, he himself did not readily understand the meaning of the lyrics. As a result, he gave up using the lyrics, thinking the audience would not understand. He then decided to write the lyrics by himself, so that the listeners could understand immediately.²⁵

²² Interview, 12 February 2012.

²³ Most of the exile Tibetan pop songs since the 2000s are monolingual. Only a few songs have mixed Tibetan and English lyrics.

²⁴ A video of the song can be watched here : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0G0Fj5wdvI> (last accessed 28 May 2017).

²⁵ Interview, 5 February 2012.

The tendency to deliberately simplify lyrics according to the audience's preferences is seen with many singers engaged in Tibetan pop. Unlike previously, when outsourcing was usual, many singers now write the lyrics themselves.

Summarizing the discussion so far, the technical transition of cassette tapes to CDs and MP3 has brought about major changes in the cultural context of Tibetan refugee society and Tibetan pop. Despite the fact that Tibetan pop finally became an industry at the end of the 1990s and the number of singers has gradually increased, the CDs and MP3s that appeared in the 2000s greatly changed music consumption. For singers, CD creation and sales have been given a new meaning. Singers who cannot earn a living by selling CDs consciously create songs that can make performances the main source of earnings. One of the implications is that the lyrics, which were previously outsourced and complex, became intentionally direct and simple, written by the singers themselves. By doing this, singers tried to connect to the audience to boost attendance of performances and sell tickets.

6. Tibetan pop highlighting differences among refugees

In the current situation, singers' efforts to secure audiences by simplifying lyrics have had a certain degree of success. However, as they simplify the lyrics, other concerns arise, such as the acceptance by new refugees.

'New refugees' refer to Tibetans who have come to India and Nepal since the 1990s, many of them being from Amdo and Kham. They have been criticized by settled refugees as 'sinicized' and therefore socially isolated. The environment in which they grew up differed greatly²⁶ from the settled refugees, composed mostly of people from Ü-Tsang. Numerous conflicts have occurred between them. As a result, the new refugees are stigmatized by the settled refugees.

One of the factors that separate new and settled refugees is their taste for Tibetan pop. New refugees enjoy listening to Tibetan pop more than settled ones do. However most of them listen to Tibetan pop from Tibet, not from exile. For the new refugees who normally listen to homeland Tibetan pop, exile Tibetan pop appears "totally

²⁶ According to Kharat, according to exile government data from 1991, 70% of the settled refugees are from Ü-Tsang, 25% from Kham and 5% from Amdo (Kharat 2003, p. 79). According to Gupta (2005: 86), who carried out research in the 2000s, 68.5% from Ü-Tsang (39% from Lhasa), 15% from Kham and, 16.5% from Amdo. The ratio of Amdo and Kham has thus been reversed.

meaningless – it is like singing a song written by children. The lyrics of the homeland songs are deep, but the lyrics of exile [songs] are shallow and I cannot listen to them”²⁷. Or, “I don’t want to listen to exile Tibetan pop. I don’t want to listen to them because the lyrics are too bad”²⁸. That was how they talked about the music.²⁹

The major difference that people see between homeland and exile pop music is whether or not there is a division of labour. Inside Tibet, songs are frequently sung, composed and written by different artists. This is in contrast to music produced in exile, where artists have been writing most of their own lyrics, to the taste of the audience, since the 2000s. Lyrics written by homeland songwriters have literary hues and educational meanings; they are the subject of praise. Many new refugees believe that the division of labour, where experts produce the best in their respective fields, guarantees the quality of music, in contrast to the low quality of exile Tibetan pop.³⁰

Lyrical differences between songs produced in Tibet and in exile also emerge because the political context is also different. As previous scholars have noted, self-expression is very limited in Tibet, due to repression and censorship (TIN 2004; Henrion- Dourcy 2005; Stirr 2008). For that reason, songwriters use metaphors and *double-entendre*, encoding superficial lyrics with deeper meanings. However, these lyrics do not always use esoteric literary expressions. Let us read ‘Blue Lake’, translated by Tsering Shakya.

Blue Lake (*mtsho sngon po*, Lyrics: Dondrub Gyal)³¹

Blue Lake,
Honoured by the people,
Pride of the motherland,
Protector of the people,
Happiness of the people.

When waves are blowing
It brings joy to the geese.
When the lake is frozen,

²⁷ Conversation with a male from Ü-Tsang (aged of 41), 8 June 2012.

²⁸ Conversation with a male from Amdo (aged of 32), 25 July 2013.

²⁹ When I was talking with a Tibetan man who illegally sells music in Lhasa, he said that the difference between Tibetan pop in Tibet and in exile was “whether the lyrics are good or bad” (30 August 2014).

³⁰ Exile singers also share the viewpoint that division of labour yields higher music quality.

³¹ A video of this song, by Dadön (zla sgron) can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LDZ5V9jZH8> (last accessed 28 May 2017).

The geese are saddened.
 The frozen lake
 Drives the golden fish beneath.
 When the ice melts,
 It brings joy to the sheep

Ai Ma! Blue Lake,
 You bear witness to history,
 You are the hope of the future,
 You are the source of happiness.

Ai Ma! Blue Lake,
 Today's happiness,
 Hope of the future,
 You are the possessor of all life forms,
 Honour of the motherland.³²

As Stirr's argument shows, the lyrics can be interpreted in numerous ways and various 'tricky' (ambiguous) words³³ are included. Tibetans from Tibet would read Tibetan nationalism, although at first glance, it could be read as praising China. In contrast many young exiles try to understand the lyrics literally and it is difficult for them to understand the hidden message without explanation (Stirr 2008: 319-321).

Richness of expression brought by the division of labour and the political situation in the homeland requires a type of literacy acquired in daily life in Tibet. In exile, new refugees possess excellent skills in that type of literacy, even with little formal education, and they use Tibetan on a daily basis.³⁴ They compare their capacities with the settled refugees and they are proud of their Tibetan language abilities. For example, a new refugee from Kham proudly said "I am absolutely better at reading and writing Tibetan than the settled refugees".³⁵ Other new refugees also said "I went to school after coming to exile to India. Although my course grades were not good, my Tibetan was always the best in the class."³⁶ Or, "People in

³² Quoted by Stirr (2008, p. 309).

³³ "Tsering and Phurbu, both men who had lived most their lives in Tibet and thus spoke fluent Chinese as well as Tibetan, pointed out what they called 'tricky words' such as 'motherland,' which according to Phurbu, Chinese people would understand as referring to all of China, but Tibetans would understand as referencing Tibet" (Stirr 2008, p. 320).

³⁴ Of course it must be added that some Tibetans can only speak Chinese.

³⁵ Conversation with a man from Kham (aged of 32), 26 August 2011.

³⁶ Conversation with a man from Kham (aged of 26), 12 June 2012.

the refugee society have freedom in education, however their Tibetan language is not good at all."³⁷ Conversations about Tibetan language abilities are frequent and young exile Tibetans admit that "Tibetans born in the homeland have better literacy skills".³⁸

For new refugees, one indicator showing the decline in language ability in exile are the lyrics of pop music, too simplified to flatter the audience's own low literacy in Tibetan and taste for plain statements. Their hearts are rarely captured by exile Tibetan pop.

7. A vicious circle in refugee societies?

Tibetan exile singers also listen to Tibetan pop from Tibet and they are keenly aware of the differences. Even the celebrated Tsering Gyurmey, who does not often listen to Tibetan pop from Tibet, recognizes that the quality of the lyrics is different in Tibet and that "given the process of training by Tibetan pop singers in the homeland, it is natural that their work is better than the work from the refugees"³⁹. Also, Mingyur Dorjee, who has left the spotlight of Tibetan pop and now concentrates on educational activities, lamented the decline of the quality in lyrics in recent Tibetan pop and pointed out that "this was occurring due to the lack of education for both the singers and audience".⁴⁰

In this situation, new refugee singers such as Choedak and Lobsang Delek, born in Tibet, but schooled in India, are in an uncomfortable position. They are now leading exile Tibetan pop, as the next generation after Tsering Gyurmey and Phurbu. T. Namgyal, and both of them are heavily influenced by Tibetan pop in Tibet. It is noteworthy that both of them are good at reading and writing in Tibetan, especially Lobsang Delek, who graduated from the College for Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarah. Although they have the literary background, Choedak chose to write plain and direct lyrics tailored to the audience's tastes in order to draw their attention. Lobsang Delek also said, "I write lyrics that the audience understands as soon as they listen to them"⁴¹.

Tailoring song-writing to the tastes of the audience and not fully demonstrating their Tibetan language abilities reproduces Tibetan language and sustains identity in a multicultural exile world. While

³⁷ Conversation with a man from Kham (aged of 34), 13 October 2011.

³⁸ Conversation with a Tibetan woman raised in India (aged of 38), 23 August 2008 ; conversation with Tsering Gyurmey, 29 August 2013; and many others.

³⁹ Interview, 16 February 2012.

⁴⁰ Interview, 11 February 2012.

⁴¹ Interview, 14 July 2012.

the production of more Tibetan pop listeners might preserve Tibetan language, it does so in a deteriorated fashion. Choedak said, "We understand that the listeners' ability in Tibetan will get worse as we simplify the lyrics, but otherwise the audience will not listen to our music".⁴² Their choice to simplify the wording for economic benefit is a reflection of and accelerating force for the current decline in Tibetan literacy.

In other words, the simplification of lyrics by songwriters such as Choedak has garnered more listeners among refugees born in exile, or sometimes new refugees from Ü-Tsang, but it fails to capture the hearts of the new refugees. Even Lobsang Delek, who uses moderate metaphorical expressions, is only "just better than the other songwriters".⁴³

8. Authenticity on trial

Changes in lyric-writing by Tibetan pop singers who have tried to engage in music as a livelihood are linked to the innovation of media technology (widespread use of illegal copying) and the demands of the audience born and raised in exile. The biggest demand from the audience is for colloquial lyrics. Underlying this demand is the notion of freedom of expression,⁴⁴ supported by multiple factors. In a context where they have to communicate in English, Hindi and Nepali, Tibetan literacy has declined and the audience can not relate to the lyrics unless they are simple. Also in educational policy of refugee society, Tibetan literacy skills were not highly regarded until the mid-1980s and the preservation of Tibetan language was not put into effect until the 1990s.

However, writing lyrics according to the demands of the audience produced unexpected side-effects. Making direct and colloquial lyrics acknowledge and even encourage the audience's declining Tibetan literacy, at odds with the CTA's attempt to improve Tibetan language education since the late 1990s. Since 2012, the CTA has endorsed Tibetan pop music, but in reality, these two positions are not readily compatible.

Tibetan pop also highlights differences between settled and new refugees. Many new refugees do not appreciate exile Tibetan pop, mainly because of its poor lyrics. However, the present situation is quite ironic. The CTA and exiles have regarded the culture of Tibet as

⁴² Interview, 25 August 2013.

⁴³ Conversation with a woman from Kham (aged of 18), 26 June 2012. She showed disgust with the lyrics and songs of Phurbu. T. Namgyal and Tsering Gyurmey.

⁴⁴ Nevertheless I would like to point out that in recent years in Nepal, it has become difficult to extensively make political arguments about Tibet.

'sinicized' in order to authenticate the Tibetan culture before the 1950s as genuine. The framework of 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' assigned to exile society and Tibet can also be applied to new refugees who are regarded as embodying the homeland culture. They attract sympathy when they are under China's repression, but, even after their perilous journey across the mountains when they arrive in exile, they are negatively judged as "sinicized." These are the remarks of a new refugee from Kham, who has lived in Dharamsala for ten years: "People from Ü-Tsang and who have been in Dharamsala for a long time are terrible. If we were not here, there would be no one who could prove the legitimacy of their claim that 'China is bad', 'China is destroying Tibetan culture'. Besides, when they try to bring out support from overseas, they always bring new refugee orphans in front of the supporters and ask for a donation 'Please give us a donation to save these poor children', but in daily life they do not care about us. Only because we are 'new refugees', they say different things and they discriminate against us".⁴⁵

In this way, new refugees have been deprived of the opportunity to have their culture evaluated as legitimate, because of the stigma of 'sinicization'. Yet, the situation surrounding the lyrics of Tibetan pop has the potential to turn around the 'cultural' superiority (based on the culture before the 1950s) of settled refugees. The settled refugees are supposed to have kept their authenticity through cultural preservation, but their argument is weakened by the high Tibetan literacy of the new refugees criticized as 'sinicized'. The equation between 'refugee culture' and 'authentic', and 'homeland culture' and 'inauthentic', comes to be questioned.

At the same time, it creates further discontinuity between the new and settled refugees, as we can see in Tibetan pop. Currently, there is a tendency to see a clivage between two audiences for two kinds of music (settled/new refugee), fitting their respective frameworks and inclinations. Of course this tendency can be overcome, notably by a homeland singer, Sherten, with his 'Song of Unity' (*mthun sgril gyi rang sgra*). It was a hit for both settled and new refugees.

Although exile singers understand this situation, adapting to the new refugees' preferences is not an option for them, as they run the risk of losing the settled refugee audience. Therefore, they rely on their traditional supporters. However, their choice has resulted in alienating the new refugees and it has reinforced the understanding that the music of the settled refugees is the authentic Tibetan pop. Conflict over the lyrics of Choedak and Lobsang Delek, who are from

⁴⁵ Conversation with a man from Kham (aged 34), 6 September 2011.

Tibet and now live in exile, will show an aspect of the painful situation they are currently in.

9. Conclusion : Critique of 'Agency-Enthusiasm'

Returning back to the question of agency in artistic production and consumption I raised at the beginning of this paper, I now turn to Ahearn (2010) and Madhok (2013). Ahearn reminds of the importance of context in discussions of agency. "It is therefore important for scholars to ask themselves how conceptions of agency may differ from society to society, and how these conceptions might be related to notions of personhood and causality" (Ahearn 2010, p. 28). She also insists that the oppositional agency represented by resistance is only one aspect of agency (Ahearn 2010, p. 30) and advocates a meta-agentive discourse analysis (Ahearn 2010, pp. 38-41), analyzing how actors talk about their own agency. She promotes analyzing the agency from three intertwined viewpoints: agency as encoded in, and shaped by, linguistic structure; agency as embedded within large-scale socio-historical processes; and agency as emerging from discourse (Ahearn 2010, pp. 44-45). Madhok likewise insists on "the need to shift our focus from actions and free acts as the governing standard of agency to an analysis of speech practices as a site of self-reflexive activity" (Madhok 2013, p. 63). Taking a similar meta-discourse analysis approach to agency, Madhok writes that "persons do not perform acontextual, ahistorical, isolated acts, but instead engage in a stream of acts that are linked to each other in certain ways" (Madhok 2013, p. 38). Agency is bound by context and constructed through discourse.

Tibetan pop is consumed via illegal and cheap avenues prompted by the free trade of music, mediated by new technologies and brought about by the movement of capital. The audience simultaneously forces the singers into economic hardship, while gaining a relatively strong influence over the production of lyrics by the artists. The singers respond with flexibility to the situation, in order to survive, by creating songs with simple lyrics. However, for new refugees, the exile pop lyrics prove that the settled refugees who criticize them for having a 'sinicized Tibetan culture' cannot 'properly' preserve Tibetan culture either. This case shows that each actor responds with flexibility, by taking advantage of the circumstances under their purview. While this can be interpreted as exercising agency, we must be careful not to blindly praise agency. Anna Tsing reminds us that, "hybridity is not all promise, and neither is agency. Destruction too requires agency. To tell its stories,

we cannot avoid the viewpoint of despair” (Tsing 2005, p. 26). Agency is the ability to produce something, good or bad. However, there is a feeling that many discussions on agency have been used as a way to describe ‘positive’ practices, favorably presenting the dynamics of culture and society under the gaze of what I would like to call ‘agency-enthusiasm’.

Considering the above points, I wish to turn away from this over-enthusiastic view of agency and analyze the situation that these chains of action have caused in the society. I have shown that the original intentions first of Tibetan singers on one side, and then of their audience, have deviated from their original stance, and produced unintended consequences highlighting the decline of literacy in the exile community. I believe that it is important to describe the chain of actions, rather than simply praise ‘agents’, whatever action they take.

Transliteration of Tibetan names

Simplified transcription	Transliteration in Wylie
Choedak	chos grags
Dondrub Gyal	don grub rgyal
Jampa Gyaltzen Dakton	brag mthon byams pa rgyal mtshan
Kelsang Kes	skal bzang Kes
Kunga Tenzin	kun dga' bstan 'dzin
Lobsang Delek	blo bzang bde legs
Mingyur Dorjee	mi 'gyur rdo rje
Pemsi	spen tshe
Phurbu T. Namgyal	phur bu tshe ring nam rgyal
Rangzen Shönu	rang btsan gzhon nu
Tenzin Woser	bstan 'dzin 'od zer
Tsering Gyurmey	tshe ring 'gyur med

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**Lineage in the Digital Age:
Didactic Practices of the Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association and
Tibet University Arts Department Tibetan Opera Class¹**

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ibetan opera (*lha mo; a lce lha mo*) is a performance form that utilizes a variety of didactic techniques ranging from oral repetition to script use, from teacher-to-student long-term apprenticeship to contemporary, institutionalized courses. In this paper, I analyze didactic techniques of two different teaching centers, alongside interviews of Tibetan opera artists in Tibet and the United States. I examine the Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association (*bal yul bod kyi lha mo tshogs pa*) located just outside Kathmandu, Nepal and Lhasa's Tibet University Arts Department's Tibetan Opera Performance Major 2010-2012.² While transmission has traditionally been conceived of as strictly hierarchical, with authority derived from the teacher, my findings suggest a more student-centered, defused model of lineage transmission. Peer-to-peer teaching models, advancement in communicative and reproductive technology and the centrality of the students in their own lineage narratives force us to re-conceptualize the material and imaginative conditions for transmission. It would be easy, perhaps, to point to increased commercialization of Tibetan opera and the increasing distribution of audio-visual material as responsible for the demise of the student-teacher relationship. Although new media and commercial interests are certainly affecting the transmission of Tibetan opera, contemporary practices escape simple categorization.

¹ I would like to start off by thanking the Columbia University Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, the Columbia University Center for Ethnomusicology and the Rubin Foundation for the opportunity to participate in the conference from which these proceedings emerge. I would also like to thank Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy for editing this volume and for all her invaluable feedback.

² bod ljongs slob grwa chen mo'i sgyu rtsal slob gling gi lha mo sde tshan; 西藏大学艺术学院的藏戏表演系.

1. Tibetan Opera in Context

Tibetan opera, a performance tradition hailing from Central Tibet (*dbus gtsang*), is performed both within the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), as well as throughout China, India, Nepal, Europe and the United States. Tibetan opera scripts are based on traditional Buddhist *namthar* (*rnam thar*), a literary genre often translated as biography. Some of these originate from Indian sources and some are indigenous to Tibet.³ These scripts have been canonized in written form through the production of official anthologies, but their performed versions represent a continuously fluid and ever-changing form of vernacular performance. While scholars of Tibetan performance have focused on transmission of monastic ritual music, as well as called attention to the rapid changes to Tibetan performance in the 20th century,⁴ very little attention has been given to the transmission practices of Tibetan opera. Tibetan opera has been described and historicized in a few important European-language works⁵ and translations and summaries of the librettos have been made available by a larger group of scholars.⁶ Despite the high quality of these sources, until the publication of Henrion-Dourcy's 2017 work, there has been very little work on didactic practices of contemporary opera troupes.

In order to address this lack of data, I carried out four months of intensive study with the Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association (NTLA) in 2010. The NTLA is based out of Jorpati, Kathmandu, Nepal and just celebrated their 40-year anniversary as a troupe in 2016. In 2010, rehearsals of the NTLA occurred weekly on Saturdays from morning to evening. The performance space was a single room with concrete walls and floors. One wall was lined with benches and the other with a floor-length mirror. Mounted above the mirror was a simple altar, upon which water, food and incense was offered before rehearsal began and before lunch was served. A single lightbulb hung from the center of the room and a storage closet, sometimes used as a meeting space, was located in the back corner of the space. Meals were prepared in the performance space using enormous pots and camp

³ These include the *rnam thar* (religious biography) of *rgya bza' bal bza'*, *snang sa 'od 'bum*, *dri med kun ldan*, *'gro ba bzang mo*, *gzugs kyi nyi ma*, *gcung po don yod dang don grub*, *chos rgyal nor bzang*, *pad ma 'od 'bar* and *ras chung dbus la phebs*.

⁴ Jamyang Norbu (1986) and Morcom (2007, 2008).

⁵ See Henrion-Dourcy (2017), Calkowski (1991), Ahamed (2006), Foley et al. (1988), Henrion-Dourcy and Tsering (2001), Dorjee, Josayma, and Tsering (1984), Drokar (2008), Hulton-Baker (1987), and Stein (1961).

⁶ See Waddell (1895), Bacot (1921), Cunningham (1940), Duncan (1955, 1967), Wang (1963, 1986), Thubten Jigme Norbu (1969), Blondeau (1973), Ross (1995), and Hulton-Baker (2008).

stoves. As the day wore on and the stamping feet of the dancers stirred up a cloud of dust, a silver-colored tea kettle would be filled with water and used to dampen the dusty, concrete ground. Group membership has risen in recent years, but in 2010, there were approximately 25 regular performers.

From 2010-2012, I also conducted eighteen months of fieldwork with the Tibet University Arts Department's Tibetan Opera Performance majors (referred to henceforth as TU students), led by Professors Tsering Woebum (tshe ring 'od 'bum) and Pasang (pa sangs). Tibet University is located in Lhasa, and their Arts Department is located east of Lhasa on the university's new campus. My understanding of the history and tradition of Tibetan opera was also derived from independent classes with Tibet University's Professor Gyala (rgyal lags), as well as interviews with an ex-member of the Shol Lhamo troupe (*zhol lha mo tshogs pa*).⁷

Students at Tibet University generally take 40 hours of courses per week. Typical of Chinese universities, students are also enrolled in physical education and daily study periods and have very little time that is not occupied by pre-described courses. Tibetan opera courses for students majoring in the arts meet anywhere from one to three times per week in the Arts Department building on Tibet University's East campus. Students also take performance-related courses, such as vocal training and ballet and have special rehearsals for mandatory university-wide and city government performances. Students meet in a high-ceilinged, large performance space, walled on two sides by floor-length mirrors and ballet bars. Long, narrow windows brighten the space during day-time courses.



Fig. 1 - TU Students in their role call lines at the beginning of a typical rehearsal. Photo by Kati Fitzgerald September 22, 2011.

⁷ This troupe was at the time giving tourist performances in the Himalayan Hotel in east Lhasa. The performer's name is purposely redacted.

I followed one class of students (11 women and 7 men) through their last year and a half of courses, through to their final performance before graduation. It must be noted that since graduation, most of the students have not pursued careers in the arts. While a number of the students auditioned for performance troupes in Lhasa and touring troupes, the students were not offered positions in those troupes and have since married, had children and found work in the education or civil sectors.

Finally, during the summer of 2015, I conducted interviews with Tibetan artists, Norbu Namgyal (rnam rgyal nor bu), Techung (Tashi Dhondup Sharzur; bkra shis don grub shar zur), Tashi Tsering (bkra zhis tshe ring) and Rinchen Dolma (rin chen sgrol ma), residing in the United States.⁸ All of these artists were trained at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) in Dharamsala. Born in Bylakuppe, Namgyal Norbu was influenced by the Bylakuppe Lhamo troupe, receiving her education at the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies in Varanasi, India. She was given the opportunity to study at TIPA for two summer sessions. She arrived in New York City in 2010 and has since been an active member of New York New Jersey Cholsum Doegar (*chol gsum zlos gar*). Norbu Namgyal now teaches Tibetan singing and dance to a new generation of Tibetan children in New York City.

Techung was born in Sikkim and began his studies as a performer of Tibetan arts at the age of 9 at TIPA, which was at that time called the Tibetan Dance and Drama Society. There he was taught by Norbu Tsering (nor bu tshe ring) (from the *skyor mo lung* lhamo troupe), as well as Purbu Tsering (phur bu tshe ring) (from Darjeeling). Originally from Lhasa, the Kyomolungpa (*skyor mo lung pa*) troupe has been highly influential in the formation of Tibetan opera in Nepal and India. During Techung's time at TIPA, the troupe also attempted to learn the Gyangara (*rgyal mkhar ba*)⁹ style of Tibetan opera by inviting the monk Chabdam Orgyan (chab dam o rgyan) to teach.¹⁰ Techung remained at TIPA as a student and performer until 1983-4, when he became a junior teacher, finally leaving TIPA in 1986. He arrived in the United States in 1987 and has since cofounded Chaksampa Lhamo troupe (*lcags zam lha mo tshogs pa*) in California and taught at

⁸ This project was made possible by the generous Robert L and Phyllis J Iles Award for Graduate Study of Myth and has been given IRB exempt status (Protocol #2015E0407).

⁹ Hailing from Gyalgar Choedzong (rgyal mkhar chos rdzong), near Rinpung (rin spungs).

¹⁰ For more on the influence of the Kyomolungpa troupe on Tibetan opera of Nepal and India, as well as information on Chabdam Orgyan, see Jamyang Norbu (2001).

Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. He was instrumental in the staging of the Tibetan opera *Sukyi Nyima* (*gzugs kyi nyi ma*) at Emory in 2013.

Tashi Tsering received his early education in the Tibetan Settlement in Mundgod, Karnataka, India. As a child, Tashi Tsering was influenced by the performances of the Mundgod Doeguling Tibetan Opera Association (*mon gho 'dod rgu gling gzhis spyi lha mo tshogs pa*). In 1996, Tashi Tsering entered TIPA. After moving to the United States in 2008, Tashi Tsering performs with Taktser Band (*stag 'tsher rol tshogs*), which frequently combines elements of American rock with traditional Tibetan folk music, including *namthar*.¹¹ Tashi Tsering's wife, Rinchen Dolma, was born in Ladakh to a nomadic family. She attended a Tibetan Children's Village school in Ladakh before getting the opportunity to begin her musical studies at TIPA in 1996. She immigrated to the United States in 2013 and focuses on the musical ambitions of her son and husband.

2. Idealized Lineage

Before starting my fieldwork, and to be honest until around 2015, my understanding of transmission and lineage in Tibetan opera was largely hierarchical. I imagined that cross pollination between schools was minimal and that the teachers were the solitary source of authority. I imagined this this authority could be passed down to students and that peer relationships were limited to learning partners. This model of lineage is typical of oral tradition, including oral transmission of Buddhist teachings. The presupposition is that there is a source, who teaches to a limited number of students, who in turn found new schools and pass on their knowledge to passively receptive students. Allusions to teachers are seen as claims to authority, authority which is held in the hands of revered teachers. Jan-Ulrich Sobisch describes the Tibetan literary *thob yig* genre, in which lists of tantric teachings, teachers and texts are meticulously and chronologically recorded.¹² David Jackson describes the deeply hierarchical manner in which lineage is depicted in Tibetan *thang ka* painting.¹³ Dan Martin terms the Tibetan Buddhist concern for lineage as "a highly historical preoccupation".¹⁴ When dealing with textual and

¹¹ Beyond its use as a genre of Tibetan literature, the term *namthar* is used to signify a sung aria within a libretto, as well as the specific style of high-register singing used in *lhamo* performances.

¹² Sobisch (2000).

¹³ D. Jackson (2005).

¹⁴ Martin (1997, pp. 15).

illustrated versions of lineage, it is understandable to take the hierarchical and chronological nature of these models as simple representations of reality. The following three sections explicate the way in which oral transmission and bodily didactic practices demonstrate how over-simplified this model of lineage and transmission is. The fifth section suggests a revised model.

While lineage may be conceived of in various ways, I approach this concept from the point of view of religious studies. Tibetan opera is frequently categorized as a secular performance form. Nevertheless, I argue that the deeply interwoven Buddhist tropes and history of the form render it religious in nature.¹⁵ This is not to say that performance of Tibetan opera is equivalent to ritual performance, but that the religious aspects of performing and viewing Tibetan opera cannot be clearly separated from the aspects of performance that operate as entertainment. The scripts of Tibetan opera (*rnam thar*) express a deeply Buddhist worldview and the rituals surrounding the performance, as well as its relationship with festivals of the Buddhist calendar, suggest that performance and viewing of Tibetan operas operate within a merit-making, Tibetan Buddhist ontology. The connection between Buddhism and opera is also a view expressed by many performers and audience members; performing or viewing the operas can be act of offering (*mchod pa 'bul ba*) or merit accumulation (*bsod nams gsog pa*). This might be seen less as an indication that opera is somehow equivalent to Buddhist teachings or philosophy, but more that preservation of Tibetan culture (including elements that are specifically un-Buddhist) is frequently framed as a religiously beneficial act.

In that sense, I understand lineage to mean the imaginative conduit by which students receive teachings. I assert that oral transmission, regardless of its relationship to religious doctrine, participates in lineages. Despite the fact that these lineages are often conceived of in linear, hierarchical fashion, I believe that the idea of lineage is not unproductive for thinking about transmission of Tibetan opera. Performers frequently identify themselves by their relationship to where and from whom they received their training (and where and to whom they conduct their teaching). The revision I attempt to make is not to throw away the concept of lineage in the oral transmission of Tibetan opera, but to suggest a diffused model that takes into account the realities of embodied practice.

¹⁵ Fitzgerald (2014).

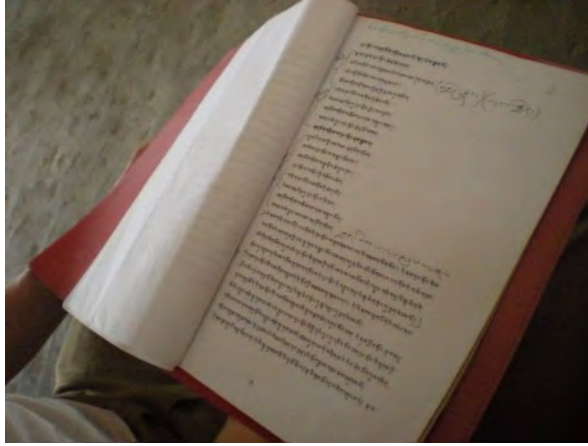
3. One Didactic Technique: Peer-to-Peer Learning

When the NTLA was learning a new play (defined as a script that the majority of the performers had not yet performed), the students sat in front of an oversized tripod whiteboard. Singing teacher Tenzin Namgyal, trained at TIPA, writes a line of the *namthar* on the board and students copy the lyrics (to the best of their ability) in their own notebooks or on scraps of paper. Most students have an advanced to moderate knowledge of the Tibetan written language. Some students can easily copy (from the board or from memory) the verses in a variety of Tibetan scripts. Younger students (as well as those who never attended Tibetan schools) had more trouble with spelling and grammar, but managed to copy the text nonetheless. The teacher then sang the line of music and the students repeated after him. In this way, students learned all parts of the new opera before auditioning for specific roles. The teacher asks students to repeat lines over and over until he is satisfied with the result.

After this period of formal learning, students begin a process of peer-to-peer education. As might be expected, seniority does not always equate to talent. Sometimes students who are younger in age have a stronger command of the Tibetan written language, a more powerful voice or a larger vocal range. These students frequently take on a teaching position for students with less experience or less developed voices. The learning process does not end after the songs have been taught. In fact, it is the reciprocal practice amongst students that has the greatest effect on the students' ability to memorize the *namthar* and develop their own performance styles.



Fig. 2 - The Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association in rehearsal July 23, 2010. Photo by Kati Fitzgerald.



*Fig. 3 - A copy of the script in use in rehearsal. Note mark-ups made by elder members of organization.
Photo by Kati Fitzgerald on July 23, 2010.*

If an opera being rehearsed has already been performed, the learning process is somewhat different. During my time with the NTLA, the troupe enacted both of these rehearsal processes (learning a new opera and rehashing a previously performed opera) once. Starting from the beginning, the scenes are played for the teachers of dance, music and the elders of the group. The scenes are stopped when there is a dropped line, a missed entrance or a muddled dance step. In this way, the teachers and students interact directly in a trial and error schema. Younger members of the NTLA are expected to stand aside and watch, practicing the dance steps and singing the accompanying parts throughout rehearsal. The younger students witness hours and hours of peer performances, which serve as their model for performance. As might be expected, this process takes time and involves many discussions among senior performers, non-performing elders and the group leaders. Good-natured controversies often arise concerning the manner in which certain scenes or dialogues should be performed. Again, seniority is not always the marker of authority in these didactic interactions. Especially athletic and refined dancers are frequently less experienced, younger members of the troupe. Additionally, performance talent is not always equally distributed and the best singers are infrequently the best dancers. This means that authority to teach is not permanently manifest in one performer. Rather, power flows between various members of the troupe as the rehearsal process progresses.



Fig. 4 - Rehearsal process of the NTLA. Photo by Kati Fitzgerald July 31, 2010.

Although the main focus of the NTLA is performing *lhamo*, they also act as a general performing arts company for the community. They are called upon during festivals, weddings and celebrations to perform a repertoire of traditional Tibetan songs and dances. When such an event is on the calendar, the association takes a few hours out of their rehearsal time to go over a select number of non-opera pieces. Some involve the entire association, while others are specific to men, women, or those members of the group who possess special skills (i.e. songs featuring the lute (*sgra snyan*), fiddle (*pi wang*), a technically advanced *rnam thar* or a regional song). These performances are another instance in which talent and authority is redistributed amongst various group members. In the NTLA, for example, the best *sgra snyan* players did not necessarily possess great singing voices. This allowed young musicians to take on both authoritative and receptive roles successively, acting sometimes as teachers and other times as novice learners.

In contrast to the relatively high number of group elders in the NTLA, TU students, who had access to only two Tibetan opera teachers, relied even more heavily upon peer-to-peer training techniques. Tibetan opera classes were frequently the last period of the day, meaning that students had time to remain in the rehearsal space after class to work on their routines. Students practiced their routines together, using the floor-to-ceiling mirror in the rehearsal space to watch themselves and their peers. While students did not frequently directly criticize their peers, as a group, they ran through scenes, dance numbers and songs multiple times until a sense of group cohesion had been achieved.

For the TU students, parts are chosen based on a once-per-semester audition, in which each student prepares an arrangement that highlights their ability to sing a select *namthar*, as well as to speak a comic or dramatic line of dialogue. Students stand in role call lines, approach the front of the mirrored classroom one-by-one and sing and act their piece. Critiques are given only in the case that the class as a whole does especially poorly. Part selection is discussed by the teachers, while the students change, and parts are distributed at the end of the class period. The preparation of these audition pieces is highly collaborative. In Chinese universities, student dormitories are sometimes arranged by major. This means that many of the TU students shared dorms (6 students to a room), as well as class time. During my visits to the female dorms, students utilized recordings on SD cards to audition for each other. Sometimes the students even broke out performance costumes and engaged in mock performances to the delight and annoyance of their bunkmates.



Fig. 5 - Example of a 512 MB Micro SD that could be inserted into flip phones as external storage. Photo by Kati Fitzgerald December 3, 2016.

TU students were also expected to participate in performances within Tibet University, at Lhasa's many national pride festivals each month and occasionally travel to other regions of Tibet and China to participate in 56 nationalities expos.¹⁶ Rehearsals for such events were often

¹⁶ Performance events and expos showcasing the particularities of China's minority nationalities are common events, both at the nationalities museums, as well as in tandem with governmental and cultural festivals. For more, see Harrell (2001) and McCarthy (2009).

performed in the presence of the Tibetan opera professors, but were most often conducted by other teachers. Students were required to perform for school events (Tibet University sports competition) and city government events (celebration of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, etc.). During the 90th anniversary performance, students worked collaboratively to write a new *namthar*. Using the singing and dancing style of Tibetan opera, students broke into groups to write small scenes. Each group was given the chance to audition their contemporary *namthar* and one group was chosen to perform at the 90th anniversary celebration.¹⁷ This is an instance in which students are not only learning together, they are also collaborating to produce new material in the lineage of Tibetan opera.



Fig. 6 - TU Student performance in Tibet University auditorium in celebration of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party. The screen reads 'Celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Communist Party of China.' Photos by Kati Fitzgerald on June 21, 2011.

4. The Role of Technology

I start this section with an anecdote about technology's role in connecting these two geographically distant groups. The trip between

¹⁷ The plot of this story was a Tibetan student bringing home a Chinese boyfriend to her Tibetan parents' home. Although the parents are uncertain about this arrangement, the *namthar* concludes with the boyfriend proving the benefit he can be (he was studying to be a doctor) to Tibetan communities.

Kathmandu and Lhasa covers a little over 1100 kilometers and takes about an hour and a half by plane. The overland trip, however, generally takes more than one day. Travelers between Kathmandu and Lhasa most frequently cross the border in Dram ('gram; 樟木), a small border-town set on the side of a steep mountain between the arid, stark landscape of southern Tibet and the lush forests of northern Nepal. Some degree of import-export passes through Dram, mostly in the form of clothing (knitted hats, gloves, scarves, etc.), lentils, spices and snack-foods moving from India and Nepal to a few shops in Tibet. Specialty items such as yak products (wool, 'bri milk, butter, yogurt, cheese, etc.), Tibetan tubers (*gro ma*) and Tibetan medicinal herbs (most expensive of which is *dbyar rtswa dgun 'bu*). Print and media are, however, infrequently transported via official import-export routes. This information sets the scene for the anecdote below.

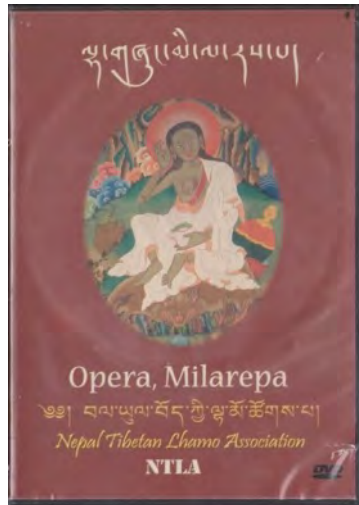


Fig. 7 - Nepal Tibetan Lhamo Association DVD of their July 2010 performance of Milarepa

During my time with the NTLA, the group performed the opera Milarepa (*mi la ras pa*) and commissioned a DVD of the performance. Having received one of these DVDs, I wanted to share the performance material with friends and teachers in Lhasa. I brought the DVD to a small print store just outside Lhasa's Barkhor and asked the owner, a friend of a friend, if he could help me copy the DVD. He looked at the cover, popped the disc into a computer and promptly told me that he had already seen the video and others had come by to make copies. Anyone familiar with Lhasa's thriving DVD/CD/VCD

grey-market will likely be unsurprised by this interaction,¹⁸ but I had been under the impression that no one was aware of the NTLA's work inside the TAR. Even if the students and teachers I interviewed were not in direct contact, there were certainly connections and a flow of Tibetan opera material between Lhasa and performance centers of Nepal and India.



Fig. 8 – There were two videographers responsible for capturing the footage for the DVD. Note that the videographers were often on stage with the performers and frequently blocked sightlines. Photo by Kati Fitzgerald on July 5, 2010.

Despite the fact that the NTLA worked to archive and sell DVDs of their performances, in 2010 the NTLA rehearsed without the aid of much technology. Electricity in Nepal was and continues to be sporadic, with load shedding occurring for up to 15 hours per day. Large institutes and corporations are able to buy and maintain costly generators, but groups such as the NTLA are unable to plan rehearsals, meetings or performances that rely heavily upon the need for electricity. The group did own a small sound mixer, with a few microphones and amps, which were sometimes used during rehearsal, but most of the learning process occurred without technological intervention. The lack of technology meant that group elders were an essential part of the learning process; these elders did not always participate directly

¹⁸ Morcom (2008, pp. 270–72).

in the rehearsals, but acted as consultants and sources of knowledge. Additionally, all members, including school-aged children, were expected to attend rehearsals regardless of whether their specific scenes or pieces would be rehearsed. This structure set up an environment of direct lineage transmission from elderly teacher to novice student.

During performances, the NTLA relies upon amplification when available and commissions a videographer to record the event. The incorporation of technology into the performances was a point of debate in the group. Older group members experienced technology as something inconvenient and troublesome. During a performance I witnessed, for example, heavy winds knocked over scenery and speakers on the stage, causing an interruption in the performance. Because electricity is unreliable, technology use in rehearsals and performance tends to be more of a hindrance than a boon. On the other hand, NTLA president Tashi Tseten (bkra shis tshe brtan) wished for more advanced amplification and lighting technology. Junior performer Ngawang Tsering was also engaged in plans for a social media platform that would link Tibetan opera troupes across India and Nepal (these plans, unfortunately, never came to fruition). This generational divide actually illustrates the way in which transmission occurred for the NTLA. Group elders and young performers were engaged in a dialectical process, marrying tradition with contemporary ideas.

TU students, on the other hand, relied heavily upon technology during their rehearsal and performance processes. During rehearsals of new material, the teachers utilized one of two DVD/CD/VCD box sets¹⁹ to teach the students snippets from the most famous and recognizable scenes in the *lhamo* repertoire.²⁰ The class did not learn any entire opera scripts, only learning famous sections from select operas. While most students could not read or write Tibetan, they used a system of vocal tone transcription and a combination of Chinese and Tibetan sound symbols to take notes. Other students forwent notes completely, sticking solely to their mobile device recordings and astute memory. All students are united in use of their mobile device to record their teacher singing the parts for which they will later be re-

¹⁹ These two box sets were published and distributed as part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Project. Tibetan opera was inscribed into the list in 2009 and has since become the object of increased government funding, academic interest and commercialization. The CD box set: dpal ldan dbang phyug (2010). The DVD box set: *lha gzhung nor bu brgyad: krung gó'i bod ljong kyi srol rgyun "khrab gzhung nor bu brgyad [Eight Precious Opera Scripts: China's Eight, Precious, Tibetan, Traditional Scripts]* (2012).

²⁰ For summaries of what are now considered the eight classic operas refer to: skal bzang don grub (1997). For English-language summaries, refer to: Ross (1995). For Party-accepted summaries in Chinese, see Wang (1963).

sponsible. Using these CDs on portable stereos, along with the aid of the teachers for difficult passages, the students collect the written and electronic resources necessary to learn their parts outside the classroom. After class, the teachers leave together and students stay in the rehearsal space. At this time, a process of what is traditionally viewed as 'rehearsal' begins. A large TV in the back of the rehearsal room is utilized to watch recordings of various Tibetan dance and song performances. These are generally the concerts pre-recorded and shown on Tibetan New Year (*lo gsar*) both in and outside the TAR on Tibetan language television station XZTV.

Beyond the use of technology in the rehearsal process, students at TU performed using the latest in stage lighting, sound equipment, LED backdrops and fog machines. I watched two formal performances in front of outside audiences. The first was the 90th anniversary performance mentioned above. The second was the final performance of the year conducted before graduation. This particular performance occurred off campus and was presented in front of a panel of directors from Lhasa's various performance troupes. The students lip-synched their vocal parts and exhibited ballet and modern dance pieces in between the *lhamo* excerpts they had been rehearsing all year. The performances are meant to showcase the physical strength and stamina of the actors rather than convey the stories of the *rnam thar*.



Fig. 9 - Final graduation performance of the TU Students. This photo shows the performers with their instructors and school leaders. Photo by Kati Fitzgerald on December 11, 2011.

I should note that my fieldwork in Nepal and Tibet occurred right on the cusp of what I somewhat playfully term the WeChat Revolution. During my time in Lhasa, the iPhone 4 appeared on the market and people began the switch from using QQ (a desktop-based instant messaging application popular in China) to WeChat. The use of iPhones, which offer an integrated Tibetan keyboard as a standard feature of the phone, as well as the increased popularity of WeChat, really revolutionized information sharing amongst Tibetan communities.²¹ Prior to the widespread use of the iPhone amongst Tibetans, there were very few electronic avenues available to communicate using written Tibetan. This meant that most long-distance communication (especially international communication) occurred via telephone. The QQ interface required some knowledge of Chinese (a knowledge that most Tibetans living abroad do not possess) and applications such as Facebook and Twitter (and more recently SnapChat, Instagram, WhatsApp & Viber) are not accessible in China without the use of a VPN. WeChat presented the first application that allowed English, Chinese and Tibetan speakers easy access to one interface.

Contemporary Tibetan artists sometimes express uncertainty about the payoffs of technology in their art. Yu, for example, interprets famous Tibetan director Pema Tsenden's corpus of films as an expression of anxiety about the effects of modernization and globalization.²² Nevertheless, it seems that when Tibetan opera artists discuss technology outside the frame of globalization or interregional relationships, they view technology as a positive influence on their art. The NTLA viewed technology as a means to both widen the reach of their art, as well as to engage the younger generation through modernization of performance modes. TU students, even with prodding, never expressed concern with their use of technology. Students felt that their rigorous training was best exhibited by accompaniment of the latest in stage technology.

US-based performers expressed a similarly practical position, Rinchen Dolma, when asked directly about the effects of technology on lineage, stated, "We Ex-TIPA women have a WeChat group and we all share old songs and lyrics. There are no younger performers in these group, but what we learn in this group we might teach to our students".²³ Both Rinchen Dolma and Tashi Tsering mentioned using Facebook, WeChat, Viber, YouTube and telephone calls to both teach and learn Tibetan opera. Rinchen Dolma sees WeChat as a beneficial tool, stating, "The best thing about WeChat is that you can repeat the

²¹ See Chatalic (2014, pp. 96–101) and Grant (2016).

²² Smyer Yu (2015, 115).

²³ Tashi Tsering and Rinchen Dolma (2015).

recording again and again. You don't have to ask the teacher to repeat themselves."²⁴ Techung, when asked about the effects of technology on the student-teacher relationship, expressed a similar antipathy.

It's just natural. It's not changed as drastically as in the west, but still the mind is wandering everything. Are you my teacher? The teacher is right in front of you. Your mind is like ... When we were growing up you were completely soaked into your teacher. Even though the mind was traveling but not as distracted as right now.²⁵

Techung and other artists expressed a resigned attitude toward increased technological influence. Namgyal Norbu stated, "If there are good sources, then it is good, but we do not have many good sources."²⁶ The artists hoped for the proliferation of good didactic resources online in the future.

There exists a complex relationship between promotion of art via dissemination technology, enhancement of modes of performance via audio-visual technology and the loss that traditional culture incurs at the hands of foreign technology. This attitude of yearning toward and repulsion from "modern"²⁷ performance modes is captured in Anna Morcom's work on post-1950s dance in Tibet (Morcom 2007). This antipathy can also be seen in the intergenerational conflicts over technology use in the NTLA. Younger performers feel excited about the prospect of disseminating their performances and yearn for more stable integration of amplification and lighting into their work. Older teachers worry, not about the foreign influence of technology, but about the distractions that technology can incur when it does not function properly. TU students embrace technology wholeheartedly and feel proud of the ways in which they transform Tibetan opera into a modern art form. They do not conceive of their own performances, fog-machines and all, as an aberration of tradition, but rather a creative continuation of it.

²⁴ Tashi Tsering and Rinchen Dolma (2015).

²⁵ Techung (2015).

²⁶ Namgyal Norbu (2015).

²⁷ I take my definition of modernity from Janet Gyatso, not as a distinct moment in Tibetan history, nor purely as an influence from outside sources. Gyatso writes, "Methodological self-consciousness is one sign that helps us distinguish between an uncritical repetition of past tradition and an intentional redeployment of such inheritance for new purposes" (Gyatso 2015, 403). It is this definition of modernity, one that is in constant flux, that I find most helpful in conceptualizing Tibetan opera lineage.

Theorists of globalization and modernization, such as Arjun Appadurai, suggest that it is precisely the introduction of mass media and migration that facilitate the popularization of imagination. This popularization entails the removal of prophetic power from one charismatic individual and places that power into the hands of ordinary students.²⁸ New technology may be facilitating the dispersal of transmission authority, opening avenues of study outside of geographic localities and giving a platform for transmission that does not necessarily rely upon prestige or physical mobility. I add that there is also a sense in which the model of dispersed lineage can be read backwards through history. If contemporary transmission methods are so diffuse and interconnected, in what ways have we been reading the archive (those documents that record who taught who, who received which initiation from whom) too simplistically? In what ways does a new model of diffused lineage encourage us to ask whether the direct, hierarchical lineage model of the past could have ever existed in reality?

5. Centrality of the Student: Imagination & bag chags

Beyond the material effects of technology (now it is louder, now I can record my teacher), human imagination is an essential element of lineage formation. I see imagination operating in two ways in this project. The first is in the relationship to Tibetan geography and history, as it is imagined by performers themselves. While many Tibetan opera artists in Nepal, India and the United States have never been to Tibet, they express a romanticized vision of the Tibetan landscape that coincides with their performance styles. One performer, when asked how Tibetan opera singing styles are influenced by their environment stated,

The geography makes a difference. I think India or Tibet, places in the Himalayas, are such wide and spacious places, so the environment helps. The environment is very clean, so the singing is unobstructed. When you sing you need openness, whatever you have you can express, which makes the singing better. Slowly, slowly practice, practice and it gets better. In the US we need a big space. In a small space, you can't really sing loudly. If you try to take all that is inside of you and express yourself freely, you can't. Out-

²⁸ Appadurai (1996, pp. 5–11).

side are you neighbors and they will think, “What’s going on!”²⁹

In this conceptualization, the artist imagines a Tibetan landscape that is clean, unobstructed and wide open. She makes direct lineage connections between the style in which she performs and the landscape of Tibet. Following Colleen McDannell, landscape here might be productively defined as “cultivated nature,” but in this case the cultivation is not a matter of building roads and sky scrapers.³⁰ Rather the cultivation of nature is occurring within the mind of the performer. The artist recognizes the trans-global connections wrought by migration, communicative technology and ethnic identity formation, while marking the localized conditions that limit her current performance modes. She takes inspiration for her own contemporary singing from a landscape with which she imagines herself physically connected. These imaginative connections to Tibetan landscapes that span time and space force us to reconsider the prominence of singular, geographically-specific teaching models.



Fig. 10 - View from meditation caves near Samye Monastery. Photo by Kati Fitzgerald June 2, 2011.

²⁹ Namgyal Norbu (2015).

³⁰ McDannell (1995, pp. 3).

Artists take influence not only from their actual teachers, those individuals with whom they memorize or rehearse a new selection, but also from stories, narratives of past and distant performers with whom they may or may not have had any physical connection. With the increasing availability of images, videos, audio recordings and oral narratives passing between the TAR and Tibetan communities around the globe, performers can witness and learn from a wide range of teachers. Beyond this more direct didactic relationship, performers of Tibetan opera imagine themselves into idealized lineage models that do not rely upon historical reality. When asked about the training of their main teachers, for example, no performer I encountered could trace their lineage beyond one generation. The artists might remember the name of some of their teacher's teachers (most did not), but none recalled any teachers before that generation. This is not to say that the performers did not feel connected to the past, but rather that this connection was creative and flexible in ways not reflected in our hierarchical lineage model.

This creative relationship with the past might be conceived of through Jackson's "digital Diaspora."³¹ Speaking about his own work with African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, Jackson argues that "Digital and 'new media' technologies provide the glue that keeps their deterritorialized spiritual community together."³² It is true that technologies such as YouTube, Vimeo, and especially Facebook and Twitter, allow Tibetan artists in Nepal, India, Europe and the Americas to share work, offer critiques and construct communal histories. WeChat and Weibo in the PRC offer similar opportunities for collaborative work, translocal teaching and pathways to popular renown. Nevertheless, creative understandings of Tibetan geography and its connections with performance developed before the advent of the iPhone and, I argue, are not entirely dependent upon new media.

The second way in which imagination challenges our hierarchical model of lineage does not rely upon technology at all, but on the Buddhist concept of *bag chags*. *Bag chags* is often translated as karmic imprint, predisposition, or habitual tendencies. *Bag chags* is different from karma (*las*) because *bag chags* are dormant impressions within the inner mind (*nang sems*) or consciousness (*rnam shes*) that might manifest as action (i.e. karma), but may not.³³ In his own personal ethnography, Topden Tsering describes *bag chags* as, "the familiarity that comes from earnest perseverance and the inevitability of one's

³¹ Jackson (2012).

³² Jackson (2012, pp. 485).

³³ Zhang (1984).

hard work meeting its reward.”³⁴ This sense of familiarity is effected by karma and, if acted upon, produces new karma, but may also remain dormant and never find expression.

This category of experience was one brought up by artists when asked about their own performance abilities. Interviewee Namgyal Norbu, when pressed to identify which of her teachers exerted the most influence over her singing stated,

Watching performances, like the 5-6 day continuous performances, from morning to night, of Tibetan New Year, we went to watch, but we did not really understand the meaning. From this I accumulated a kind of *bag chags* [...] I think it is a little easier for me to perform *namthar* because of a kind of familial homeland connection – for example, my parents are from U-tsang and for them there is a kind of familiarity with the style of singing, the way of vocalizing, the sound. This makes a difference I think. For example, people from Kham do not really sing *rnam thar*, so there is a difference, I think. When we sing *rnam thar*, it is not only what the teacher tells you. It is one’s own strength, or talent of the individual performer.³⁵

This karmic imprint can come from the activities of a previous life, but it can also manifest in relationship to experiences accumulated within one’s current lifetime. The theological or ontological belief in reincarnation aids in reliance on *bag chags* as a formative element, but it is not essential. One can understand *bag chags* as a predisposition, which can be connected to karma accumulated over many lifetimes or simply collected experiences within this life.

Despite a definite respect for their teachers and elders, the artists repeatedly told me that the quality of the performer is not produced by the teacher; it is something self-produced, karmic and inherent. This might be where my evaluation of lineage in Tibetan opera must depart from lineage in a religious context. This is not because the religious student does not stand at the center of transmission, but rather because there is much more at stake for a religious novice to claim their own talent, authority or importance. Artists are able to make socially-acceptable, rhetorical claims to greatness and centrality that would be very difficult for a religious student to make without seemingly contradicting religious precepts. Artists are not held to the

³⁴ Topden Tsering (2012).

³⁵ Namgyal Norbu (2015).

same standard of renunciation and are not expected to act as model bodhisattvas.

6. Conclusion: Diffused Lineage

Instead of the teacher acting as the grounding, catalytic force for achievement, how would our conception of lineage in Tibetan opera change if we flipped the formula on its head? If the individual skills of the student (precipitated by their karmic accumulations) was placed at the center of our formulation, the prominence of a single teacher becomes less necessary. Although hierarchies of power and prestige always operate on some level, by thinking about lineage alongside *bag chags*, we work against a hierarchical understanding of lineage that passes (via the agency of the teacher) unto waiting students. Instead the individual student might be seen as a magnetic center to which many influential teachers, peers and styles are attracted. The strength of this force of attraction is determined by the skill of the artist, which is in turn determined by the *bag chags* of that individual.

In this model, multiple teachers, including peers and institutions, are karmically drawn to the student, who acts as the foundation for transmission. This model is not dependent upon physical migration or communicative technology and therefore is not a product of modernization or globalization. The centrality of the student and the flexibility of lineage are key to oral transmission. Extensive use of peer-to-peer teaching models, creative incorporation of technology as didactic tools of transmission and students' own imaginative understandings of lineage all point toward a need to unsettle the hierarchical lineage model. Instead of understanding power and performative authority as flowing top-down from sanctioned teachers to passive students, I suggest that performance authority flows from multiple sources into the hands of students. The degree to which the student receives and maintains teachers is dependent upon their individual talent, as well as their willingness to utilize peers and communicative technology in productive ways. The predisposition that some performers have to attract teachings can be conceived of through the notion of *bag chags*. The talent of the individual student is not only a sum of the teachings they receive, but exceeds the individual influences she attracts.

Although hierarchical and chronological lineage conceptualizations might continue to persist throughout the broad range of Tibetan cultural production via lineage invocations, lineage paintings and *thog yig* texts, analysis of oral transmission and didactic techniques

force us to understand lineage through a diffuse lens – a lens that takes into account the powerful and generative force of imagination. This imaginative ability of performers and practitioners means that the past is never fully relegated to the past. It also means that land and kinship play important roles in transmission. Finally, as technology continues to shape the archive and forge new transmission conduits, the centrality of the student becomes more and more important for the continual propagation of oral art.

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The Art of the Tibetan Actor: *A lce lha mo* in the gaze of Western Performance Theories

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1. Introduction

mong the few studies on Tibetan performing arts, opera (*a lce lha mo*, often simply called *lha mo*) has garnered a fair amount of attention.¹ Most of the research has considered the context of performances, whether cultural, historical, or socio-political, but very few publications have examined the actual work of the performers, both on-stage and off-stage. In this article, drawing on my drama training in the West, I would like to shift the focus onto aesthetics, and attempt to open the black box of how *lha mo* is made and experienced by the actors. What is the language of *lha mo*, and what are its core values? What is the specific body of knowledge, physical or otherwise, mobilised to produce the show? How is the training organised, and what are the priorities? It looks like a simple shift, but it is complicated by the internal diversity of the *lha mo* tradition. Although the overall features of Tibetan opera spectacles are constant, troupes follow different performing styles² and not all

¹ See the Bibliographic Introduction to this issue (pp. 35-40) for publications on *a lce lha mo* since 1986.

² A customary distinction differentiates between the acting style of the dBus region (*dbus 'khrab*), active and funny, and that of gTsang (*gstang 'khrab*), solemn and sedate. More precisely, before the People's Republic of China's take-over in the 1950s, styles were named after the most popular troupes, especially those who were summoned to perform at the Yoghurt Festival (*zho ston*) in Lhasa, in front of the Dalai Lama and government officials. Favoured by the audience were the Lhasa-based sKyor mo lung pa, the only troupe playing the dBus style. It comprised a large number of landless actors who roamed all over Tibet (and Darjeeling, Kalimpong,...) to perform in order to eke out a living. The particular social conditions of these actors entailed increased performance opportunities and specialization and explain their partial professionalisation during the first half of the 20th century. This has had tremendous consequences on their acting style and, consequently, on that of other troupes, be they *zho ston* troupes or less high-profile troupes of wandering beggars. The other full-fledged *lha mo* troupes

the troupes engage(d) with *lha mo* practice with the same level of commitment—most of the troupes were, and still are, amateur, but acting terminology and performance are most refined and developed among professional troupes. It is thus important to specify what tradition of a *lce lha mo* I will be portraying in the following pages.

The reflections in this paper stem from three and a half years of ethnographic fieldwork carried out over fifteen years ago for a doctoral dissertation.³ I went first to Lhasa, as a language student at Tibet University, with occasional field trips across the Tibet Autonomous Region to interview actors and record their performances. I then went to exile settlements in India and Nepal, but staying mostly in Dharamsala.⁴ My main interlocutors, on both sides of the Himalayas, were actors performing in the sKyor mo lung (the most famous pre-1950s troupe, based in Lhasa, with a funny and active style) tradition, therefore this is what will be discussed here. I spent most time with the Zhol lha mo tshogs pa in Lhasa, which was then the most respected amateur troupe. It comprised a large number of defrocked monks in their sixties and seventies, who had played *lha mo* as young monks in the 1940s under the guidance of one or another sKyor mo lung teacher. They had a strong affection for *lha mo*, which they saw in some form of personal continuity with premodern Tibet and the religious life they once engaged in. I also frequently met with some professional performers of the government-run Tibet Opera troupe, TOT (*bod ljongs lha mo tshogs pa*, Ch. *zanju tuan* 藏居团), who were the institutional inheritors of the sKyor mo lung style, since the sKyor mo lung ba had been subsumed in 1960 into the work unit that was going to become the TOT. In exile, my main contacts were with the professional actors of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA), especially with *lha mo* master Nor bu tshe ring (1928-2013), himself born and trained in the sKyor mo lung troupe before he went to exile; and with the professional actors he trained, such as current artistic director Blo bzang bsam gtan, younger *lha mo* masters at TIPA, and polyvalent actor-musician Tenzin Gönpö in France. I also interviewed older actors and teachers based in Bylakuppe, who were acquainted with the sKyor mo lung

of the *zho ston* came from gTsang: the most celebrated was the rGyal mkhar ba (from Rin spungs), playing an ancient-looking and solemn style that still carries on, the gCung pa (from Ri bo che, the monastic seat of Thang stong rgyal po, the purported founder of *lha mo* in the early 15th century, a tradition still thriving today) and the Shangs pa (from rNam gling, a style that now appears extinct).

³ Now published (Henrion-Dourcy, 2017).

⁴ See Henrion-Dourcy (2013) for details about how research was carried out, and a reflexive comparison of the political conditions of fieldwork on both sides.

ba during their years in Lhasa, and I surveyed most of the amateur troupes coming to perform at the Dharamsala *zho ston*.



Fig. 1. The last teacher of the pre-1950s sKyor mo lung troupe, bKra shis don grub (?-1961) and his wife A ma Lhag pa (1909-1997). Undated photograph (c. 1960?), unspecified collection from the PRC. http://www.humanrights.cn/en/Messages/Focus/focus014/4/3/t20090302_421468.htm (last accessed 27 April 2009).

The ‘art of the actor’ that will be evoked below represents solely the practices of the Zhol pa, TIPA, and amateur troupes of exile, which were then very similar,⁵ and excludes the TOT, since its performance and training techniques, aligned with conservatory-style People’s Republic of China (PRC) practices, have profoundly altered the skills of the actors, moving towards hybridization with other techniques prevalent in mainland China. Even within this single sKyor mo lung style, I have noticed some differences between the Lhasa and

⁵ As I could see in 2013, the Zhol troupe is now comprised of very young actors and has extensively engaged in ‘modernized’ and shortened *lha mo* shows, although it still performs along traditional lines on demand, notably at the *zho ston* festival in Lhasa.

Dharamsala troupes,⁶ mostly imputable to the specific sKyor mo lung teacher they had learnt from. Except for the 'teacher' (*dge rgan*) of the troupe, who generally has a comprehensive view of the production of the show, actors have different vantage points on their troupe's tradition, according to their own acting experiences. This was especially true for the sKyor mo lung troupe, which was gradually becoming 'professional' during the first half of the 20th century, with some actors tending to specialise in given roles.

The cultural context and general features of *lha mo* performances are by now relatively well-known in Tibetan studies,⁷ so I will restrict this paper to considerations on the work of the actor. I will try and give an inside view into the making of *lha mo*, rather than echoing the voice of the scholars (historians, folklorists) who speak about *lha mo*. My aim here is to provide a reflexive account of my learning process, which may be helpful to younger scholars coming to specialized fields within Tibetan studies. How useful was my previous training in drama in apprehending Tibetan dramatic forms? I assumed that our common practice would facilitate mutual understanding, all the more since the drama techniques I had learnt, based on the body of the actor and genealogically rooted in intercultural performances, led me to believe that the body was the 'universal' core element of theatre. As with any anthropological investigation, this is a story of becoming aware of wrong assumptions, decentring the view, and opening up to new understandings.

2. From Aesthetics to Meaning and Back

The project I had set out to do twenty years ago was congruent with the training I had received in drama school (see next section). I had been encaptivated by the transformative power of body work in a performance context. I wanted to explore the most comprehensive Tibetan drama tradition, *a lce lha mo*, and engage with the discourses on participative ethnographic research and embodied reflexive practice that were then gaining popularity. I was inspired by research in this vein carried out (more by drama scholars than anthropologists) on classical Asian drama traditions,⁸ for example in Japan

⁶ For example, conventions about how the director of the troupe (*dge rgan*, 'teacher') gives a hint to the actors that they should start of a slow or a fast dance, or variations in the vocabulary pertaining to the melodies and vocal techniques.

⁷ See also Kati Fitzgerald's contribution in this issue.

⁸ See the two issues compiled in *Asian Theatre Journal* on "The Founding Fathers" of Asian drama scholarship (mostly) in north America: Vol. 28 no. 2 (Fall 2011) and Vol. 30 no. 2 (Fall 2013).

(Bethe & Brazell, 1978), India (Zarrilli 1984, 2000), China (Riley 1997, see also Li 2010), and Indonesia (Bouvier 1994), and this groundwork was yet to be done for Tibet, all the more with an immersive practice-centred approach.⁹

Anthropology was then going through a renewal process. After the ‘interpretation’ paradigm centred on meaning and semiotics, sustained by Clifford Geertz and others, came the ‘experience’ paradigm, notably in the work of Victor Turner (1986) and his followers, drawing on phenomenology and focusing on performance, embodiment, emotions, and the sensory realm. So my project was to look at “the actor *in* performance” (Riley 1997), the actual experiences of the performers on the stage. What was their specific body of knowledge, how was it acquired and transmitted? How was the scenic language organized? I wanted to circumscribe the ‘aesthetics’ of *lha mo*, both its form and feeling, or, to use Chinese opera specialist Li (2010)’s word, to circumscribe the ‘soul’ of Tibetan opera. In retrospect, this is a naive and exalted view, but at the time, it seemed sympathetic (Nascimento 2009) and most importantly a politically safe engagement with Tibetans in Lhasa, given the politics of fear that weighed on prolonged interactions with a conspicuous foreigner.

I soon found out, however, that engaging a not yet familiar culture with one’s body, so to speak, did not make any sense locally. The first obvious challenge was mutual comprehension, especially at that time in the TAR, where English speakers were extremely rare (none among the actors, who were either elders or did not enjoy a high level of schooling). This placed an urgency on learning the language to try and engage meaningfully with the actors. Second, this dramatic tradition was not yet well-known. Substantial descriptive and interpretive groundwork still had to be done. There was no way I could circumvent ‘meaning’, which absolutely preceded ‘experience’ in this case, because I first had to grasp what the actors meant, and try to minimise the misinterpretations. Consequently, it was necessary to study deeper and in all its variability the Tibetan history, religion, and folk culture to map out the place of *lha mo* in premodern and contemporary Tibetan society.

⁹ This is still largely lacking today, but we can cite British Ethnomusicologist Anna Morcom (2008) who engaged in *rdung len* songs in Amdo (yet her approach is critical and socio-economical, rather than reflecting on embodied practice). British Dance Professor Ann R. David (2013, p. 59) wrote a few passing reflections on a *cham* dance in Bhutan—she repeated the movements on her own after looking at video excerpts, and tried to grasp the experience from an embodied point of view. American Tibetologist Kati Fitzgerald (2014) is trained in drama but, in her paper, she did not reflect on that training nor engage with Tibetan actors as a performer.

Third, the kind of 'embodied practice' I was looking for is generally carried out by requesting to learn from a reputed master, recognized as the holder of his tradition. *A lce lha mo* is not a classical genre akin to other 'elite', or literate, Asian traditions. It is a folk genre (despite its recognition as a world heritage at UNESCO in 2009), fairly diverse and with no performer that would unequivocally be recognized by all as a 'master'. My work therefore became a multi-sited collection of fragments and partial recollections of *a lce lha mo*, rather than a locally rooted deep understanding of a single privileged informant's view. Finally, given the everyday preoccupations and sensitivities of the people in Lhasa at the time, caught in a very tense political climate, if I had constantly shifted the lens to decontextualized, apolitical, timeless, 'pure art' and 'embodied' aesthetics, this would have been a form of ethnographic violence imposed onto the local people, completely misrepresenting what they do and why they do it.

Hence, from drama and 'aesthetics', I moved over to Tibetology and 'meaning'. Yet, this article is an opportunity to reconsider *a lce lha mo* in the light of Western performance theories centred on the body. Let us see if something of value can still be learnt in this confrontation of views and so, for a while, let us delve again into aesthetics.

3. Western Approaches to Performance: Centrality of the Body, Geodramatics, Presence

From 1993 to 1995, I trained at the École Internationale de Théâtre Lassâad in Brussels,¹⁰ an offshoot of the École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris.¹¹ It teaches 'movement theatre', building on body awareness-in-space, biomechanics, the psychophysical continuum and mime techniques during the first year, and then moves onto formal training in stylistic forms, such as mask use, commedia dell'arte, tragedy, buffoon and clown, among others, during the last year. Like other experimental theatre makers of the 20th century, Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999) was looking for the 'roots of theatre', and strongly believed that the body was not only this root, but beyond, that it was the core element of any form of creation.

¹⁰ <http://www.lassaad.com/> (last accessed 15 May 2017).

¹¹ <http://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/> (last accessed 15 May 2017). His impact has been important on the renewal of dramatic forms in France and Europe and his students have created numerous companies all over the world, including sixty or so companies in north America and the United Kingdom.

“(…) The laws of movement, space, play and form (…) are a precise vocabulary pointing towards the sources of creation” (Lecoq, 1997, p. 12).¹² “The laws of movement stem from the human body in action: balance, imbalance, opposition, alternation, compensation, action-reaction (...). There is a collective body [*i.e.* the spectators] that knows if the spectacle is alive or not” (*id.*, p. 32). “Mime is at the very centre [of dramatic creation], as if it were the theatre’s very body: it is about being able to play at being someone else, being able to give the illusion of anything.” (*id.* p. 33). The trainees’ work involves first getting rid of the parasitic movement forms that do not belong to them, anything that hinders “finding life for what it is” within themselves (*id.*, p. 39). The initial steps of Lecoq’s training are first and foremost a “deconditioning of embodiment, of all the physical traces ‘the world’ leaves in us, in the form of automatisms” (*ibid.*). Trainees need to observe in and around them and relearn how to walk, look, think, show emotions... If anything, those years in drama school were, for me, a very good preparation for ethnographic fieldwork at large.

This is a search for the “naked gesture,” stripped of personal surplus and aligned with “life itself”. “Life is our first reading” (*id.*, p. 56). The movement of life itself is inscribed in our bodies and organizes our movements and emotions. Life is recognized through the miming body and replay, and is experienced in the abstract dimensions of space, light, colours, matters and sounds. Physical and mental attitudes are in resonance: bodies do not lie. That is the state of the “poetic body”, the common source of art for mankind, filled with memories of feelings, sensations, and movements, that can then be projected out in creation. Lecoq assumes the idealised and essentialised nature of his ideas about ‘the body’ and ‘the world’ (or life), but he fails to address their pitfalls.

From this ‘poetic body’ emerge all sorts of dramatic territories, which he calls “geodramatics” (pp. 107-109). “Melodrama is the territory of big sentiments and the spirit of justice. Commedia dell’arte is the territory of small arrangements, cheating, hunger, desire, and the urge to live. Buffoons are a caricature of the world, of the grotesque dimension of power and hierarchies. Tragedy evokes the big chant of the People, the destiny of the Hero. Mysteries bring us to look at the incomprehensible, between life and death, at the devil that is provoking the gods. And the clown provokes laughter by showing his frailties, his solitude” (*id.*, p. 108). Consequently, my original project was to discover the Tibetan geodramatics: what aspects of human nature are played, and put forth, in this *lha mo*

¹² All the translations from Lecoq’s book in French are mine.

style? What are the elements of human behaviour, across the wide spectrum of all human possibilities, that are put into movement? And then, to better describe the language of Tibetan opera: what are the tools that are used to express these stakes (masks, mime, costumes, songs)? In other words, I wished to circumscribe the “embodied imaginaries” (Pradier 2007) of *a lce lha mo*.

This system of learning is steeped in the French mime tradition. Its genealogy is different from the performance research and practice taught at university departments in the United States and the United Kingdom, which have historically delved more into intercultural performance.¹³ Yet it is convergent with another set of performance theories that have enjoyed a wide diffusion across academes, in part due to the contribution of performance theorist Richard Schechner (1985): the research carried out at the Denmark-based International School for Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) by Italian-born Eugenio Barba, one of the most well-known disciples of Jerzy Grotowski. Theatre Anthropology also has a physiological understanding of performance, the body being seen here again as the source of all expression.

Barba starts from the observation that what commands the attention of spectators is the actor's stage ‘presence’, which he thinks is remarkable in the case of all Asian drama traditions. How is presence achieved? It is achieved at the pre-expressive level (before any message is conveyed), through extra-daily body techniques (Barba & Savarese, 1991, p. 5). The artificiality of the performing body creates physical tensions, a surplus of energy that inevitably attracts the onlookers' attention: something is going on. These extra-daily techniques come into contrast with daily ‘techniques of the body’ (Mauss, 1973 [1936]), that try to achieve movements efficiently, with the least effort. Barba (1995, pp. 13-35) goes on to detail the “recurring principles” of ‘presence’ and these extra-daily techniques (that are reminiscent of Lecoq's laws of movement): balance in action; dance of oppositions, consistent inconsistency, and the decided body. He devotes a special attention to weight shifts and the use of the

¹³ Intercultural performances between Tibetan and Western actors/dancers/musicians are still scant to this day. Let us cite France-based artist Tenzin Gönpo's productions with choreographer Carolyn Carlson (*Man over mountain, Spiritual warriors*, 2001), horse trainer Bartabas (*Loungta, les chevaux de vent*, 2003-2005), and choreographer Yutaka Takei (*Les quatre saisons et le cycle de la vie*, 2008). We can also cite Australia-based Tenzin Choegyäl. As far as teaching *a lce lha mo* techniques to Western actors, I am only aware of two instances: Tenzin Gönpo to Italian actors during the Venice Biennale (2001) and classes taught by US-based Sharzur Tashi Dondhup (Techung) to Emory University Dance Department in 2012 and 2013.

spinal column, how it is diverted from the perpendicular axis in certain positions, to the arms and the eyes.

In this cognitive-biological approach to performance, the body of the performer is 'alive' (Barba & Savarese, 1991, p. 12). The extra-daily physiological work that the performer engages in to produce 'presence' involves a heightened use of the body: sharper senses, better control over articulated body parts, and increased muscular tensions to hold 'contradictory' postures (the head and arms facing in one direction, while the waist and legs face another, for instance) or to 'balance oppositions'. Barba calls this heightened state the 'dilated body' (Barba & Savarese, 1991, p. 25; Barba, 1995, p. 81-100), which he posits as being the essence of the theatrical experience. The body 'feels' dilated by the performer. It also dilates his presence on the stage: his body is 'perceived' dilated by the spectators, as if it were taking up more space.

4. First Look at the Art of the Tibetan Actor: Articulating Bodies?

In my first contacts with *lha mo*, I was predictably looking for body techniques that I was trained to observe. I scrutinised the actor-in-performance to isolate the neutral 'poetic body' of Lecoq, or the very expressive 'dilated body' of Barba. I observed the obvious stage presence of the most charismatic actors, carefully writing down shifts of balance, oppositions between hands and eyes... I even spotted what looked like interesting breathing techniques. I tried to engage physically with *lha mo*, learning not in open participant observation, so as not to attract too much attention from the authorities, but in the quietness of private lessons. All of these undertakings quickly proved unsatisfactory.

First, the language of *lha mo* was not self-evident, and I could not make immediately sense of what I was seeing. For most of their time on the stage, the actors were standing straight and motionless: spine deviations and oppositions surprisingly did not seem to be very frequent in this performing style. The *lha mo ba* (*lha mo* actors) looked strongly planted vertically into the ground, rather than articulating the various expressive parts of their bodies. Silent mime was absent, and gesture codification was minimal: a few terms for head and hand gestures during greetings. The identity and feelings of a character were only slightly evident in stylized movements: anatomy, which was so important in my training, was hardly relevant here. The basic dance steps (those of the slow dance, *dal 'khrab*, and of the fast dance, *mgyogs 'khrab*) were not technically or rhythmically too complex, yet

they were not that easy to reproduce. Executing them with the same degree of poise and lightness as the actors was a challenge. In short, the gestural repertoire of a *lce lha mo* appeared fairly limited, and my concerns with body language met with amazement, or rather amusement, by the actors. Clearly, to them, *lha mo* was not at all about 'dance'.



Fig. 2. Actor performing acrobatics: the minister tries to escape the punishment of the king. Zhol pa troupe performing the play Padma 'od 'bar. Lhasa, 1997 © Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy.

Second, this weird fixation with bodily engagement, and willingness to learn and show the moves, was socially awkward for local standards, especially for a young woman. In central Tibet, people are usually relaxed body-wise in private or intimate contexts, but in public come expectations to be composed and refrain from uncontrolled or disgraceful movements, since they bring shame ('hot face', *ngo tsha*).

Third, a *lce lha mo* was definitely a folk style performed mostly, and historically until probably the beginning of the 20th century, by amateurs. It was not a classical genre that required a lengthy, rigorous and organized training like *jingju* (京剧, Beijing opera, Riley 1997, Li 2013) or Kathakali (Zarrilli 1984, 2000), for example, where the best trainees started early in childhood and carried on well into

adulthood. There was not, in *lha mo*, a ready classification of skills to master, which could organize the student's learning, like the 'four skills and five canons' (*sigong wufa*, 四功五法) of *jingju*.¹⁴ Training in *lha mo* was not organized in a coherent body of knowledge that would be transmitted from teacher to student in a planned and gradual manner, not even in the Tibet Opera Troupe. Performance knowledge was disseminated throughout the performances. A performer's knowledge depended on his own curiosity to learn, his willingness to ask question and try new roles. In other words, *a lce lha mo* appeared to work organically, without a fixed actor's tool box, and I was perplexed as to how to make sense of it with my preoccupations and the vocabulary I had at my disposal.

I was realising that the performance techniques I had learnt were based on unquestioned universalist assumptions that crumbled when confronted to local realities. I was reminded of the Indian scholar Rustom Barucha's (1993) famous postcolonial critique of intercultural theatre, where he questioned the theories of theatre experimentalists, such as Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Richard Schechner, or Peter Brook. He deemed they had mythologized Asian drama's aesthetics, taken it out of their local contexts. They had "faith in universals" (Barucha, 1993, p. 32), but only those which served their own artistic pursuits in the West. This misappropriation in the realm of avant-garde performance was also denounced by British scholar Christopher Innes (1993), who compared it to 'primitive art' from Africa and elsewhere made by turn-of-the-20th century Western (mostly Parisian) painters. They knew very little about the realities on the ground, and were more interested in self-promotion.

5. The Tibetan Literate View of Drama: A Bodhisattvic Tool?

So, what was Tibetan opera all about? When I asked my performance history teacher at Tibet University, Zhol khang bsod nams dar rgyas (1922-2007), he replied in the same way with which he opened his book about Tibetan performing arts (1992, p. 1, pp. 21-24): *a lce lha mo* is a type, in some accounts even the exemplary type, of *zlos gar*, a view he held in common with most of the notable scholars from Tibet.¹⁵ That is also how Jeanette Snyder (1979) has structured her

¹⁴ The four skills are: singing, speaking, dance-acting and combat-acrobatics. The five canons are: mouth, hands, eyes, body and steps (Li, 2010, pp. 57-58).

¹⁵ Blo bzang rdo rje (1989); 'Phrin las chos grags (1989); Hor khang bsod nams dpal 'bar (1989, p. 65); *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (1996, p. 3117, under *a ce lha mo*); rDo rje thar (1999, pp. 457-458); Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, p. 1818,

article, the first important description of a *lce lha mo* in a Western publication, based on scholar-informants in Dharamsala. Of course, anthropologists must not only measure their theories against local ethnography, but also, and importantly, against local theories.

Zlos gar is today a polysemic term: its premodern literary usage differs from its various current colloquial uses.¹⁶ In the presentations of *lha mo* by Tibetan scholars, *zlos gar* refers to the premodern literate understanding of 'drama' as a 'lesser science' (*rig gnas chung ba*), within the larger classical Buddhist framework of the ten 'sciences' (Skt. *vidyāsthāna*, T. *rig gnas*), literally 'sites of knowledge'.

This Indian Buddhist model of knowledge, "the cultural panoply of the *bodhisattva*" (Seyfort Rugg, 1995, pp. 102-103) maps the various types of skilful means to turn the minds towards enlightenment. Since its adoption by Tibetans in the 9th century, this model has known a number of adaptations by local scholars, the five 'lesser sciences' appearing to be a Tibetan addition to the Indian five major sciences. The model presented in Fig. 3 is that of Klong rdol bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang (1719-1794), considered one of the most representative models, at least one of the most extensively used in dge lugs pa monastic curricula.¹⁷

The ideal Buddhist scholar must thus cultivate and master meditative contemplation,¹⁸ logic/dialectics and grammar, on top of medicine (to alleviate suffering) and technique (to create tangible and intangible works that inspire the minds towards the Dharma). Out of the five lesser sciences, four are subsumed into the major science of grammar: poetry, metrics, lexicography and drama (*zlos gar*). The fifth one is astrology.

The term *zlos gar* first appears in Sa skya Paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1181-1251)'s *Gateway for the All the Sages* (*mkhas pa rnam 'jug pa'i sgo*). He probably used (coined?) it to translate Sanskrit terms for which there was no equivalent in Tibetan society: *nāṭaka* (drama play), *natana* (dance, pantomime) and *nāṭya* (theatrical performance, or dramatic art in general). It thus covers stories, dance and music. The term shows confusion, because it is not a direct translation from

under *zlos gar*); dGe 'dun 'phel rgyas (2011, pp. 138-139); and even, early on, and unrelated to works published in the PRC, the Ladakhi scholar 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (1980-81, pp. 26-27).

¹⁶ See Henrion-Dourcy (2017, pp. 163-190) for a detailed discussion of the evolving meaning and usage of the now widely used term *zlos gar*, and of the theories about drama by Tibetan premodern and contemporary scholars.

¹⁷ For more information on Klong rdol bla ma's model, and other classification into eighteen fields of knowledge, see Sobkovyak (2015).

¹⁸ The sciences are given here in simplified form. See Fig. 3 for more translations of the Tibetan terms.

an Indian science, and yet there was no concrete counterpart in Tibetan experience. For centuries, *zlos gar* remained a purely notional Indo-Tibetan hybrid with no actual existence in society. As a field of knowledge, it occupied only a marginal place in the monks' education. In contemporary scholarly writing, *lha mo* and *zlos gar* are frequently equated, even combined (*lha mo'i zlos gar*), but this association predates the 1950s.

In Klong rdol's model, *zlos gar* appears simultaneously as a lesser science stemming from the major science of grammar,¹⁹ and as an element of the major 'science of making' (technique). Commentators to Klong rdol bla ma often add that drama is produced through the appropriate use of the body, speech and mind. Klong rdol further divides *zlos gar* into five²⁰ limbs: narration, music, costumes and props, humour and *zlos gar* (once again), that we can understand here as encompassing all the physical work on the stage: dance, mime, gestures, bearing, ways of moving across the stage.

This model offers in a way a convenient view to organize the work of the actor, both into the five types of skills on the stage and into the three levels mobilised to work: he needs to prepare physically, vocally and mentally to perform. But it is very general. Nothing is told about the hierarchy between these techniques, or how this model helps the actor in his learning. It does not open the black box of how *lha mo* is made by the actors. Essentially, this model theorizes *zlos gar* as edification. It is a skilful, linguistic and technical, means to turn the spectators' minds towards the Dharma. It portrays the ideal role of drama in society, but it overlooks the fact that *lha mo* performances are not just about lofty ideals, contemplation and morality. Humour is certainly mentioned in this *zlos gar* model, but looking at how actors cross-dress, joke about sex and farts, or satirise a wide range of public figures and social ills, we are at pains to qualify these very popular improvised insertions in the show as skilful means conducive to Enlightenment.

This discussion about the partial and purely theoretical Tibetan adaptation of Indian notions about drama leads us to consider another related body of Tibetan scholarship: the adaptation—or rather, reformulation—of the Indian *rasa* theory. *Rasa* (lit. 'taste', but

¹⁹ It is worthwhile to mention here that the Tibetan scholarly commentators often discuss *zlos gar* as "that which has the four categories of languages" (*skad rigs bzhi*), probably another Indic input—it is strangely reminiscent of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the translation into Tibetan and availability of which is not ascertained so far—with no real counterpart in social practices.

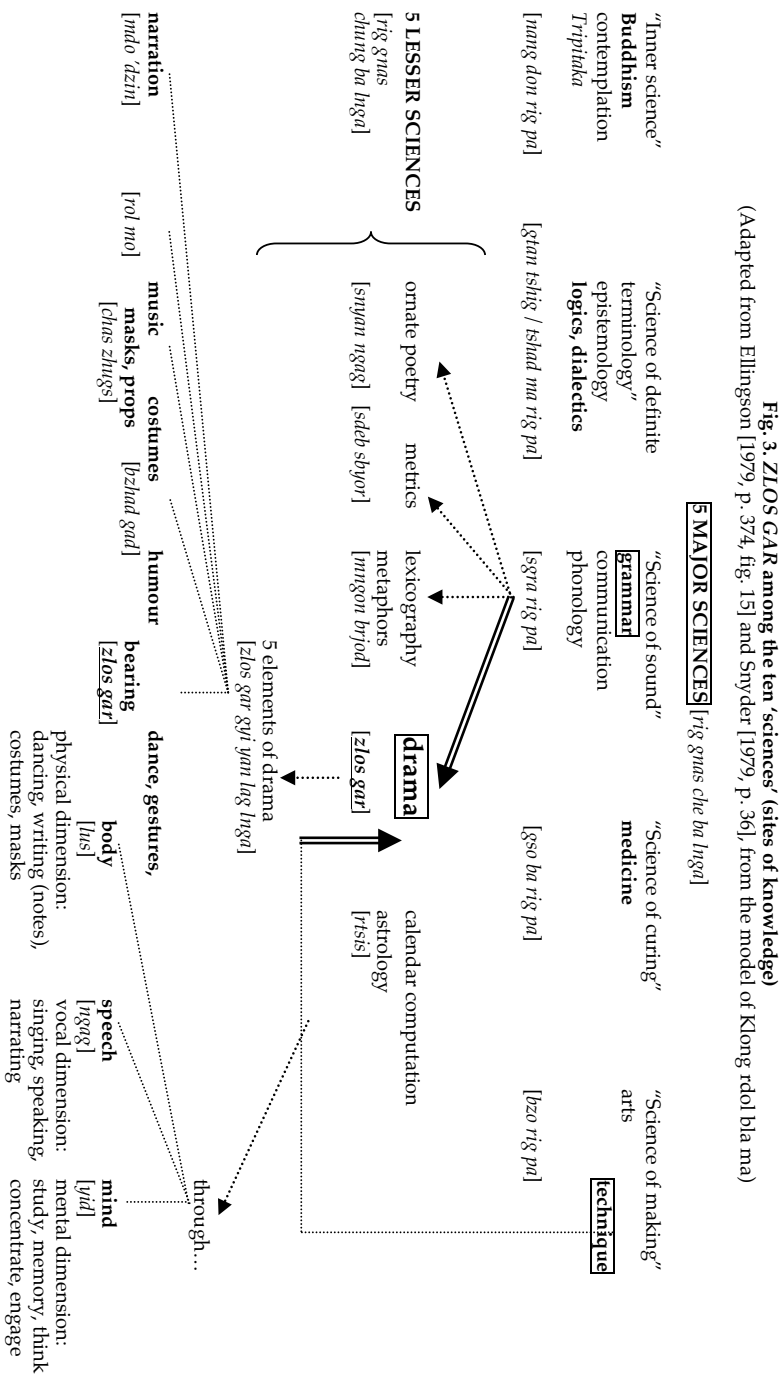
²⁰ Note variability here: other pre-1950s scholars only count four subdivisions, without the reduplication of *zlos gar*, or add a sixth one (chorus) or even a seventh one (auspicious wishes).

refers to the aesthetic experience enjoyed by the viewer/listener of an art form) is the cornerstone of Indian aesthetics.²¹ It was first developed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*Treatise on Theatre*, 2nd century BC-2nd century AD), and was then applied to other art forms, notably literary composition. Indians have long debated on the number of *rasa*: most theories count eight *rasas*, with an additional ninth *rasa* of peace/calm.

Rasa is mentioned in Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Gateway for All the Sages* and in the Tibetan translation of Daṇḍin's *Mirror of Poetry* (Skt. *Kāvyaḍarśa*, T. *snyang ngag me long*), so Tibetans have known this concept at least since the 13th century. However, *rasa* remained confined to literary theory in Tibet, and was never applied to stage aesthetics, the work of the actor or even pre-1950s reflections on *zlos gar*. It is only in the writings of contemporary Tibetan scholars that the association of *rasa* with *zlos gar* is made.²²

²¹ For a summary of the many discussions about *rasa* in Indian aesthetics, see Warder (1989).

²² Blo bzang rdo rje (1989, p. 16); Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, p. 1817, under *zlos gar*)



“In his treatment of *rasa* theory and the classification of poetic tropes, Sākya Paṇḍita, for better or for worse, cast a mold for the treatment of Indian literary theory that has endured in Tibet to the present day. The distinction between a primary emotion (*sthāyibhāva*) and the aesthetic sentiment engendered by its skillful depiction (*rasa*), all-important for the developed forms of poetic theory in India, is largely forgotten, and the primary concern is the classification of harmonious and conflicting sentiments” (Kapstein, 2003, pp. 780-781).

The Tibetan terms chosen to transpose the Indian dyad are somewhat confusing. ‘*Gyur* (or ‘*gyur ba*) renders the Skt. *bhāva* (emotions, rather than *sthāyibhāva*, primary emotions) and *nyams*, often written in the compound *nyams ‘gyur*,²³ renders the Skt. *rasa*. The *Great Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary* indicates that ‘*gyur* is a “movement of the mind”, whereas *nyams* is “its expression through gesture and speech”.²⁴ This distinction between internal feeling and external manifestation is a Tibetan innovation. It is absent from the Indian *rasa* theory, which is more keen to differentiate between the ‘rough’ (untouched) feeling, as experienced in everyday life, and the refined and distanced aesthetic experience of that feeling enjoyed in front of a work of art. Furthermore, the established Tibetan list of the ‘Eight *rasas*’ (*nyams brgyad*, a list usually used on its own, not in a binding association with the list of eight ‘*gyur*) does not equate word-to-word the Indian list. The eight Indian *rasas* are commonly given as *śṛṅgāra* (erotic), *hāsya* (comic), *karuṇa* (pathetic), *raudra* (the tragic, furious), *vīra* (heroic), *bhayānaka* (terrible), *bībhatsa* (horrible, odious), *adbhuta* (marvelous). As we can see from Fig. 4, the first *rasa* (‘erotic’ in India, coupled with the primary emotion of *karuṇā*, love, compassion) is transposed more chastely in the dyad felicity / charm-elegance. In the Tibetan list, compassion is a *rasa* and it is associated with the emotion of sorrow.

²³ Not to be confused with *rnam ‘gyur*, the bearing of a character on the stage, cf. infra

²⁴ *nyams ‘gyur gnyis su phye ba’i blo’i ‘char sgo la ‘gyur ba zhes dangl ‘gyur ba de lus ngag gi thog nas phyir mngon pa la nyams zhes zer* (Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo, 1996, p. 938, under *nyams ‘gyur*).

Fig. 4. The Tibetan adaptation of the Indian *rasa* theory

Movement of the mind 'gyur [ba] (adaptation of Skt. <i>bhāva</i> , emotion)	Translation	Manifestation of the movements of the mind <i>nyams</i> ['gyur] (adaptation of Skt. <i>rasa</i> , aesthetic experience)	Translation
<i>dga' ba</i>	joy, felicity	<i>sgeg pa</i>	elegance, charm
<i>dgod bro ba</i>	mirth	<i>bzhad gad</i>	laughter
<i>mya ngan</i>	sorrow	<i>snying rje</i>	compassion, kindness
<i>khro ba</i>	anger	<i>drag shul</i>	cruelty, ruthlessness
<i>spro ba</i>	excitement	<i>dpa' ba</i>	courage
<i>'jigs pa</i>	fear	<i>'jigs rung</i>	terror
<i>skyugs bro ba</i>	disgust	<i>mi sdug pa</i>	unattractiveness
<i>ngo mtshar ba</i>	amazement	<i>rmad byung</i>	marvel

As Matthew Kapstein explained in the earlier quote, Tibetans were chiefly preoccupied with classification of feelings, not with the effects of art. In the writings of contemporary Tibetan scholars, the *nyams* are also mere lists, sometimes related to dance.²⁵ *Lha mo* specialist Blo bzang rdo rje (1989, p. 16) applies *nyams* to drama (*zlos gar*), but unfortunately does not cite his sources. He lists nine *nyams* (*zlos gar gyi nyams dgu*), divided into the three *nyams* of body (charm, courage and unattractiveness), the three *nyams* of speech (cruelty, laughter, terror) and the three *nyams* of mind (compassion, imposing [rather than marvel] and... peace). To him, all nine *nyams* have to be shown in a *lha mo* play for it to be called successful. Music composer and researcher sPen rdor (1990, p. 47) further thinks that the artistic "underdevelopment" of *lha mo* is due in great part to the non-operational theory of *rasa* in Tibet. However, characters in the *lha mo* performances do not go through such intense, paroxysmal states of mind. At least, these are not shown on the stage. Actors look mostly impassive, abiding in restraint, as if practising a continuous *rasa* of peace throughout the show.

As was the case for *zlos gar*, the concept of *rasa* has been transposed from India to Tibet in an incomplete and disconcerting way. Its use was limited to monks and scholars with an advanced

²⁵ Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, pp. 487-488), under *gar gyi nyams bryad* (the eight expressive attitudes of dance) and *gar gyi cha byad dgu* (the nine instruments of dance)

training in poetics in pre-1950s Tibet, and was not relevant to local life, let alone to the work of the actors of a *lce lha mo*. None of the performers I met had ever heard of the *nyams* theory. It clearly did not organise their acting on the stage. The Tibetan scholarly theorisations were again not useful entry points into the actual art of the performer. So it was high time that I turned towards the actors themselves and asked them what their work was all about.

6. *The Performers' Interpretation of Drama:
The Utterance of a Sacred Text?*

I first went to my *lha mo* teacher, 'Jam dbyangs blo ldan (1932-2007), the director (actually called *dge rgan*, 'teacher') of the Zhol pa troupe, hoping to learn some basic dance moves. He consistently responded by lengthy lectures on the meaning of each *lha mo* play, and substantial explanations of specific sung arias, on both their words and their melodies. His priority was to make sure that I understood the meaning of the texts. Very often, when I met new *lha mo ba* informants, especially those in the countryside that were heading regionally famous troupes, they assumed that I had come to ask them to recite part of a play. They were always very proud to show the scope and accuracy of their memory.

I was repeatedly told that the purpose of a *lha mo* performance was simply to utter a text, through either narration, for the vast majority of the stanzas, or singing—a fraction only of the stanzas. It is a Buddhist text, it illustrates in simple ways the major teachings of Buddhism for illiterate peasants, mainly the law of karma and the importance of compassion. It depicts the travails of a hero, or heroine, remaining true to their faith through adversity—generally the other characters' greed or jealousy. Actors and peasants often attribute the *lha mo* texts to the Buddha himself,²⁶ more as a general reference than a belief in the Buddha's real authorship. Therefore this text is treated with respect, like all manifestations of Buddhahood in body, speech and mind. In the Tibetan Buddhist cultural context, the perfect utterance of such revered words has ritual efficacy. It creates positive *rten 'brel*, the auspicious causal connections that produce good outcomes, such as the spread of the Doctrine. It also pleases the local mundane gods, ensuring peace and prosperity for the community.

²⁶ Except for one *lha mo* play (*Chos rgyal nor bzang*), the librettos are not signed, so their authorship, of possible successive authorships, are not known.



Fig. 5. Libretto of the play *Ras chung dbus la phebs* kept by the Treasury Office (rtse phyag las khungs) to check the performances of the troupes during the pre-1950s *zho ston* festival. Lhasa, Tibet Opera Troupe, 1999 © Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy.

The text that the actors follow is called *'khrab gzhung*, 'perform-text' (libretto), where *'khrab* etymologically refers to 'stamping' [here: the ground], so it alludes to dancing, or at least a physical activity. A *lha mo* performance is divided into three main parts: the prologue (*'don*),²⁷ always the same and unrelated to the story that will be played, the libretto (*gzhung*), and the auspicious conclusion (*bkra shis*). The number of librettos is limited: it is nowadays very common to read that there are 'Eight great plays' (*rnam thar chen po brgyad*, translating the Chinese *ba da zangxi* 八大藏戏), but there were at least nine different librettos performed at the *zho ston* until the end of the 1950s.²⁸ The stories are well-known and widely circulated across the Tibetan cultural world through oral transmission, books and art, therefore the spectators do not come to *lha mo* performances to discover anything new.

'Khrab gzhung are not composed *ex nihilo*. They are stage adaptations of a literary version of the play called *rnam thar*. It is thus this literary genre that has given its name to the sung arias of *lha mo*, also called *rnam thar*. *rNam thar* is a significant literary genre in Tibet. Originally, *rnam par thar pa* refers to a spiritual state, the 'complete

²⁷ See Henrion-Dourcy (2015) on this first section of the performances.

²⁸ The additional libretto being titled *Ras chung dbus la phebs*, cf. Fig. 5.

liberation' (Skt. *vimokṣa*), from the cycle of rebirths. It came to designate the biography of exemplary figures that were held to have achieved this complete liberation. It has gradually been applied to a variety of biographical genres in Tibet, among which we find the *a lce lha mo* stories. They are exemplary moral and spiritual tales of a single hero or heroine—their name is the title of the libretto. These stories are either *jātakas*, or Indian or Tibetan tales modelled on *jātaka* tales.²⁹ Therefore, *lha mo* plays are Buddhist edification narratives with a significant Indian cultural input in terms of mythologies, place and people's names, and natural features (names of plants, animals and fruit, for example). They have been tibetanised to an extent, in line with the vernacularisation of Buddhism that took place in Tibet during the second diffusion of the Doctrine, but it is quite ironic that with such a distinctively Indian imaginary, *lha mo* has nowadays become a 'Chinese' intangible cultural heritage.

The adaptation of the literary version (*rnam thar*) to the stage version ('*khraab gzhung*) consists mostly in versification, since nine-syllable-lines (*dgu tshig*), usually in stanzas of four or six lines, are the easiest to sing out.³⁰ The *gzhung* is much shorter than the *rnam thar*, but the cuts are not made uniformly: narrations in prose are heavily cut, whereas dialogues in verse are kept as such. The *gzhung* usually develops the beginning of the *rnam thar*, and condenses the final part.

I had started this research project assuming that in *a lce lha mo*, as in other documented Asian theatre traditions, making drama was an organic process, stemming from constant improvisations and improvements by actors. But I soon realised that it did not hold in the Tibetan case. Here, the text was not only central, it also came first. Tibetan drama consists in the transposition to the stage of a pre-existing text, which has been made suitable for performance in a libretto format. Actors are at the service of the text, not of the production of a spectacular show that would captivate spectators. Rather than being performers, in the Lecoq or Barba sense of the term, *lha mo* actors are first and foremost storytellers.

Tashi Tsering (2001, 2011) has underlined the common genealogy that associates *lha mo ba* and *bla ma ma ni* (or *ma ni ba*), the famed tellers of Buddhist edification tales (prominently containing the *ma ni mantra*),³¹ who roamed Tibet to narrate these stories while pointing with a stick to the scenes on an accompanying *thangka* or portable

²⁹ On the literary sources shaping the composition of the various *rnam thar*, see Henrion-Dourcy (2017, pp. 266-268).

³⁰ On this process of adaptation, see Henrion-Dourcy (2017, pp. 276-282).

³¹ *Om ma ni padme hum*.

votive structure.³² The repertoires of *lha mo ba* and *ma ni ba* show considerable overlap. Moreover, some texts mention their names as interchangeable,³³ so it may be the case that, at some point in history, or in specific regions of Tibet (most probably in gTsang), the same performers could deliver either a *bla ma ma ni* telling of a story, or a staged *a lce lha mo* version. The famed rGyal mkhar troupe from Rin spungs in gTsang comprised, until the 1950s, performers who played *lha mo* and others who recited the same stories in the *bla ma ma ni* style. Last but not least, both *lha mo ba* and *ma ni ba* revere Thang stong rgyal po (1361 [1385?]-1485 [1464?])³⁴ as the founder of their tradition (Tashi Tsering, 2001, p. 37).

However, in the course of my study, I gradually came to relativise this absolute centrality of the text as an organising principle of performance.

First, in many respects, the prologue, in which the ritual preparation of the scenic space is achieved, can also be considered the ‘key’ part of the performances (Henrion-Dourcy, 2015). As *lha mo ba* themselves often told me, “If you want to understand *lha mo*, you have to understand the ‘don first’”. This introductory section is probably older than the middle one centred on the libretto. It may even be at the very origin of Tibetan opera—if we give credit to the oral tradition. All the technical elements of *lha mo*, such as the dances, gestures and vocal skills that appear in the middle section are already present in the prologue.

Second, the idea of the centrality of the text refers, among other things, to the actors’ claim that they strictly follow the text. But which text, the *khra b gzhung*, or the literary *rnam thar* ? It is the *khra b gzhung*. It is kept by the director of the troupe, usually at his home. Theoretically, it is a very important element of the transmission of *lha mo* knowledge, but in practice, transmission from teacher to student was (in pre-1950s Tibet) and still largely is, oral. In principle again, in pre-1950s Tibet, each director could adapt a *rnam thar* and compose a libretto that would be the hallmark of his troupe. In practice, librettos (and the related organisation of the show) were kept from one director to the next, and even copied from one troupe to another, often with monetary compensation. Some librettos therefore took the form of handwritten notes, with no *rnam thar* kept as reference. Cuts

³² This tradition appears to have died out in Central Tibet, and is slowly going extinct in exile (Tashi Tsering, 2011).

³³ Tashi Tsering (2001, n. 34, p. 45) quotes an excerpt from rTse gsol zur Dpal ldan shes rab, *Rgyal po sprin gyi bzhon pa'i rtogs brjod* (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skru khang, 1983, p.3), written in 1873, where the author equates *bla ma ma ni* and *a lce lha mo*.

³⁴ On the uncertainty of Thang stong rgyal po’s dates, see Tashi Tsering (2007).

and copying mistakes would be frequent, and sometimes, after a few transmissions down the line, the exact words of the text became incomprehensible. Only the high-profile troupes that performed at the *zho ston* were controlled for their observance of the text by an official of the Treasury Office (*rtse phyag las khungs*). The official librettos were actually kept at that Office (see Fig. 5). In contemporary Tibet, the *rnam thar* have been circulating in book format since the end of the 1970s (see 'Phrin las chos grags 1989 for the reference anthology) and have somewhat standardized, or at least reshuffled, the literary material at the disposal of the actors. In other words, the text may be central to performance, imbued with an idea of sacredness, or immutability, but it is more notional than effective.

Third, do the actors really follow the libretto? The words that are uttered on the stage do not correspond to those in the libretto. There are some adumbrations and modifications on the spot—some are kept from performance to performance as a troupe tradition, without writing it down in the *'khrab gzhung*. Moreover, the text spoken out on stage exceeds the written text. There are many ad libitum improvisations, generally humorous, that are like time suspensions within the play (weddings, oracles, beggars, boatmen, monks and nuns engaging in a fight). Contrary to the lines from the libretto, these words are delivered in a non-stylized fashion, close to everyday speech. Librettos are therefore neither definite nor prescriptive; they are flexible, which confers diversity to performances. As Albert Lord (1960, p. 101) famously showed, the combination of fixity and variability is a characteristic of verbal arts.

Fourth, if the text is the most significant part, how come that in the sung arias (*rnam thar*), it is generally not the most interesting parts of the stanzas that are sung out? Stanzas typically contain four or six lines. In the first two lines, the character often introduces himself and begs to be listened to. The important meaning appears in the next lines, which are often not sung by the character, but recited quickly by the narrator.

Fifth, in pre-1950s Tibet, most of the actors were illiterate. It was frequent, but not systematic, that the directors of the troupes were literate, typically because they were defrocked monks. But many actors were peasants, and most sKyor mo lung ba were illiterate. The rGyal mkhar ba,³⁵ on the contrary, were married religious practitioners and could read and write. Accordingly, if the text is so central, is it not paradoxical that it was mostly transmitted orally between illiterate actors, who sometimes did not understand its meaning? Librettos alternate between literary Tibetan and colloquial

³⁵ See note 2.

language, so some passages can be abstruse for poorly educated performers.

Sixth, the same is true for the spectators. If the actors themselves do not fully understand the text, how could the audience? Moreover, as in most Asian literate dramas, unless one is familiar with the text (having learnt parts of it), on-the-spot literal comprehension is very difficult—this is of course not the case for the improvised humorous parts, uttered in a relaxed manner in ordinary speech. The vocal work imposed by the performers onto the words of the libretto distorts natural pronunciation. The narrator speeds up in a recto-tono voice the recitation of the *gzhung*, a style often jokingly referred to as the ‘Tibetan rap’. When singing the *rnam thar* airs, on the contrary, enunciation is extremely elongated—the emblematic ‘long air’ (*rta ring*) of the prince (*rgya lu*) of the prologue lasts for seven minutes, but only contains 28 syllables. Many meaningless interpolations (*tshig lhad*) are added to the text. It is generally on these syllables that the singer can display his full vocal artistry, namely his mastery of glottalisations (*mgrin khug*) and ornamentations (*‘gyur khug*).

For all of these reasons, although it is said to be central, the text appears to be a pretext: it is indexed rather than performed, because the actors do something else with the text. They do not simply utter the words, as ‘simple’ storytellers would do. They are on a stage, in front of a large audience, and they give a three-dimensional life to the characters. So, what are the codes along which ‘text utterance’ becomes a spectacle in the *lha mo* context?

7. Producing Characters: *Envelope, Movement, and Melody*

Since Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), Western drama has emphasized impersonation, *i.e.* acting techniques helping the actor to create the illusion that he is someone else. It involves a fair extent of psychology in the West, but conventions vary cross-culturally. In *jingju*, for example, role types are categorized through costumes, acting codes and musical systems (Li, 2010, p. 56), a triad that we also find, though with different parameters, in Tibetan opera.

It looks as if the *lha mo ba* were not interested in creating the illusion of a character on the stage. Actors go in and out of their roles continuously. For example, an actress sings a moving air (*rnam thar*) bidding farewell to her children for about three minutes, moving the audience to tears, then the scene is abruptly disbanded. The characters go back to the large circle made of all the actors waiting on the outer edge of the circular stage (or stay put if the next scene

follows with the same set-up), and everyone starts a collective dance on the beat of the percussions. The narrator then moves forward, explains the next section of the plot, and calls the same (or other) characters to come forth and act their part. These short moments, when actors impersonate characters, generally consist in solo *rnam thar* songs, performed mostly, sometimes sitting or kneeling on the floor—note that singing and dancing are typically dissociated in *lha mo*. Dialogues are cut by collective dances, the lively exchange between characters being limited to occasional short spoken dialogues. There is thus no emotional build-up across scenes. Any identification that was achieved during a scene is immediately swept away by twirling collective dances and loud drum beats.

Moreover, performers are relaxed about their roles—except for the solemn performances of the *zho ston*, even today. Fully dressed as a king or a butcher, an actor may take a little rest on the side of the stage, chat and drink beer with his relatives, then suddenly jump to his feet and run to sing his *rnam thar*. Or, he may slip out to the toilets and come back in the middle of an intense scene. It may also be an occasional spectator moving right across the stage at a tense moment. These are not perceived as disturbances. In other words, the imaginary space of 'fiction' on the stage is constantly violated by *lha mo ba* coming out of their roles. There is no clear demarcation between actor and character: it is not marked by sacredness and ritual, as in Japanese art forms, for example.



Fig. 6. Actor singing a *rnam thar*. Zhol pa troupe performing the play Padma 'od 'bar, Lhasa, 1998
© Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy.

In Tibetan terminology, actors do not ‘embody’ characters. To say that someone ‘plays’ the queen, for example, actors use the verb *thon* (to depart, to come out, to put forth). It thus indicates the reverse movement to that of embodiment: actors ‘produce’ their characters. Characters (*don cha*)³⁶ are constructed through a combination of three elements: costume (envelope), dance (movement) and melody.³⁷ The principle is that of the *leitmotiv*: each character has in theory a set costume, a set way of moving across the stage and a set melody that belongs to him or her. Anyone of these three elements should be sufficient for a *lha mo* connoisseur to immediately identify the character portrayed. In practice, borrowings and on-the-spot adaptations are frequent, especially since the *lha mo* revival at the beginning of the 1980s. Character conventions are thus not demarcated into clear classifications; there is an element of fuzziness.

First, the costumes (*‘khrab chas*)³⁸ and masks (*‘bag*)³⁹ are subsumed in a single category (*chas zhugs*). There are different types of masks (not worn by all characters) and costumes (worn over the actors’ own clothes). The visual conventions do entail some symbolism, but on the whole they are intuitive. A spectator with no knowledge of *lha mo* will at least guess the social rank and temperament of any of the characters.

It appears that costumes work like ‘masks’ in the art of the Tibetan actor. Surely, the ‘production’ of a character involves something going from the inside out: actors definitely concentrate and clarify their intention before they perform. But it also seems that there is another congruent process going from the outside in. Once their ‘envelope’ (costume, possibly a mask) is put on, once they need to get out of their passive role in the background of the stage and come forth to act as characters, it is as if the envelope gave them an impulse towards the appropriate demeanour befitting the costume/character. The envelope appears to confirm, or stabilise their character. Barba & Savarese (1991, pp. 202-203) had noted that the ‘dilated body’ is also achieved through costume, which gives amplitude and shapes or restricts movement.

³⁶ *Mi sna* is also used, but refers to the dignitaries from surrounding countries at the end of the play, coming to pay homage to the new celebrated king.

³⁷ See Henrion-Dourcy (2017, pp. 525-634) for a detailed description of the main techniques of the *lha mo* actors.

³⁸ See Henrion-Dourcy (2017, pp. 528-540) on the types of costumes and their symbolic codes.

³⁹ See Henrion-Dourcy (2017, pp. 540-554) on the categories and symbolism of the masks.



Fig. 7. Zhol pa troupe performing the play sNang sa 'od 'bum. Nyemo, 1997
© Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy.

Second, actors need to produce the *'khrab 'khyer* ('perform-carry?') of their character.⁴⁰ This comprises not only the dance-like moves made on the beat of the percussions when the character travels across the stage,⁴¹ but also the bearing dictated by the social and temperamental features of the character, as well as the requested poise (*rnam 'gyur*). There are an infinite number of *'khrab 'khyer*, based on social rank, temper and situation (a fearing minister does not move across the stage like a proud minister). But the most significant distinction is between male (*pho 'khrab*) and female (*mo 'khrab*) movement styles.⁴² Most *'khrab 'khyer* are variations of one or the other. There are very few stage conventions: a full circle around the stage indicates a long trip; a foot put onto the body of someone signifies he is vanquished; a mask taken off signifies death. Greetings are important and the

⁴⁰ The word-to-word meaning of the compound is not clear to me. See Henrion-Dourcy (2017, pp. 554-586) on the corporal work of the *lha mo* performers.

⁴¹ *'Khrab 'khyer* refers only to the movements of a single character, not to the collective dances or other movements executed during the performance. The collective dances comprise the slow dance (*dal 'khrab*) and the fast dance (*mggyogs 'khrab*), as well as their variants. Other movements include those performed in the prologue, for example the somewhat spectacular *'phag chen* ('big leaps') of the hunters, or the *byin 'bebs* ('bringing down the blessings') dance of the princes.

⁴² Barba and Savarese (1991, p. 21) assess that the distinction between male and female ways of moving in performance is the most invested by conventions throughout all cultures.

subject of long dance developments, as are the parting between mother and children.



Fig. 8. Female heroine moving across the stage on her 'khrab 'khyer dance. Zhol pa troupe performing the play *gZugs kyi nyi ma*. Lhasa, 1997 © Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy.

The verb *'khrab*, to play, denotes stamping (the ground, to the beat of percussions). So, actors are primarily stampers. The dancing body of the *lha mo* actor requires vigour in the legs, with a low centre of gravity, and lightness in the upper limbs (arms are supposed to float). Shoulders, neck and head are straight without being stiff. The head moves only for greetings, which may involve rotating the head in both directions. Hips are traditionally fixed, which contrasts with the currently prevalent 'swinging' imposed on almost all 'ethnic minority' (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族) dance styles crafted in the PRC performing arts work units.

Lha mo movements are also characterised by constant gyration. Most of the performance is spent either standing straight (when narrating or singing) or circling around the stage. Actors make turns on themselves when they walk in a straight direction. Their arms and hands also engage in continuous spinning: large circular movements go from the inside towards the outside of the body, in uninterrupted movements. Openings are wider towards the right (positively

connoted) side, closer to the body on the left (negative) side. The lotus flower (*padma*) is a commonly used image in the names of these arm spins, and one can indeed imagine that these movements bloom in multiple corollas around the dancer's body. All *lha mo* movements are round and turning, there are no sharp angles and lines as in the Chinese theatrical forms.

Third, voice is undoubtedly the most emblematic and developed art of the *lha mo* performer. As I have explored it at length elsewhere,⁴³ and as this article deals with the bodily work of the actor, it will suffice to say here that melody (*gdangs, rta*) is the distinguishing feature that marks the identity of a character. In principle, a character has one melody (sometimes more), which he repeats throughout the day, regardless of the situation. In practice, at least in the sKyor mo lung tradition, melodies are borrowed between characters, and additional melodies, like the 'common melody' (*dkyus gdangs*) and the sad song (*skyo glu*) are options for the singers. The spectacular vocal skills needed to produce a *rnam thar* effortlessly and with pleasure may take years to master, especially the glottalisations (*mgrin khug*) and ornamentations (*'gyur khug*). This is the only area within the art of the Tibetan performer where virtuosity is cultivated.

It is thus not surprising that the training of body and voice are dissociated in traditional *lha mo*.⁴⁴ For movement and dance, there was no rehearsal in pre-1950s Tibet (except for the *zho ston* troupes, who could rehearse for up to two weeks): learning was done through visual observation and imitation (*mig gran*). But vocal training, as well as melody memorisation, required more focused teaching, in a one-to-one interaction between teacher and student. It is also on the voice technique and quality that most of the spectators' criticism is directed. Physical movement and demeanour, on the other hand, receive very little attention.

8. The Aesthetics of *lha mo*: *Composite, Flexible and Natural*

In the light of the discussions above, it is clear that the aesthetic language of Tibetan opera is not geared towards the enchantment of the spectators through the display of the performers' patiently cultivated extra-daily physical skills, as Eugenio Barba understands it. Yet, there are remarkable skills in *lha mo*: the vocal abilities of some

⁴³ Henrion-Dourcy (2001).

⁴⁴ See Kati Fitzgerald's article in this issue for an assessment of contemporary teaching methods.

actors definitely exhibit stunning virtuosity, refined over the course many years. And some acrobatic moves, like the *phag chen* ('great leaps'), are not easily done by ordinary people. Likewise, the purpose of Tibetan opera actors is not to create the captivating illusion that their fictitious characters are present on the stage.

Lha mo ba are first and foremost storytellers—if we look at the historical genealogy of their practice and if we listen to how the actors interpret their own work. We could say that *lha mo ba* accomplish a magnified *bla ma ma ni* performance. They bring the two-dimensional visual illustrations of the thangkas of the *ma ni ba* onto the three-dimensional space of the stage. Like the *ma ni ba*, the *lha mo* actors tell the spectators a story (which also involves singing) and show them images. A *lha mo* performance is essentially an extravagant slide show. The 'images' produced (*thon*) are relatively static, if we compare Tibetan opera with other, more dynamic, Asian performing arts. These images are short performance vignettes interspersed in the narration of the libretto (which is the thread and main reason of/for the performance). In these short capsules, lasting about five minutes, the actors display their characters as life-size icons, as if they were puppets: rather than act in a realistic manner, they parade with the 'envelope' of the character (the costume, sometimes a mask) and stylised dance moves. They evoke their characters, they let them be seen: they do not impersonate them. But, of course, the art of the actors is both visual and aural. Interestingly, these two dimensions seem disjointed in *a lce lha mo*. In most of the performance capsules, during the 'parading' on the percussions, actors do not sing—although it does occasionally happen, for example when the king first enters the stage at the beginning of the show. Likewise, when the actors sing, they do not move—a striking exception being the scenes where children are separated from their mother or when a hero is taken away by executioners.

This 'art of the Tibetan actor' is developed in aesthetic values emphasising the composite nature of the show, and the flexibility and naturalness of performance.



Fig. 9. Humorous interlude. Grib tshe mchog gling troupe performing the play 'Gro ba bzang mo. Lhasa, 1998 © Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy.

First, the fabric of the performance is akin to patchwork. The nine-hour-long performance (in a traditional setting) is a succession of disconnected scenes, featuring some repetitive patterns (not necessarily in the following order): the narrator recites the *gzhung*, followed a capsule where some performers show and sing their characters, then the troupe does a collective dance, or some actors start a humorous interlude to spice up the show. Tension and emotional tonality change all the time, but between scenes, not within them.

Second, the 'theatrical creativity' (Li, 2010) of the *lha mo* actors entails constant adaptations. *Lha mo* is like jazz, it is played with flexibility on a fixed canvas. In a traditional setting, the show is not entirely planned beforehand. The 'conductor' of the show is the director of the troupe, who typically doubles as the narrator. Before the show, as he knows the abilities of the actors, he chooses who will play which character. The rest is decided on the spot. So the actors have to repeatedly look at his signals to know what kind of collective dance, slow or fast, needs to be performed. During the show, he discreetly goes behind an actor to give instructions or remind him of his lines. Depending on the circumstances of/in the performance (the weather, the fact that an actor is unavailable—at the toilets, or having just lost his voice, the sudden departure of the show's sponsor...), the

director may decide to shorten the performance by not playing the 'capsules', and instead recite the libretto quickly. He chooses to expand or condense the show according to context, as long as the whole *'khrab gzhung* is uttered. On an individual level, actors also enjoy a great degree of freedom, especially in the demonstration of their vocal skills. Experienced singers choose melody adaptations where they can show off, or on the contrary preserve, their voice.

Third, actors are expected to perform in a relaxed, 'natural' (*rang bzhin*) and fluid (*bde po*) manner. Strain or effort, in either dancing or singing makes the spectators feel uncomfortable, to the contrary of many Chinese traditional operatic forms. Grace is strongly valued, and it is achieved by experienced actors—beginners are usually deprived of it. The point of the show is not to seek constant virtuosity. It is to create bit by bit, piece after piece of the patchwork, an overall atmosphere imbued with simplicity, suppleness, grace, devotion, humour, and an occasional demonstration of virtuosity by an individual (singing a *rnam thar*). Such is the flavour or life among Tibetans. Such is the 'dramatic territory' (Lecoq 1997, p. 107) of a *lha mo*.

9. Conclusion: Presence on the Tibetan Stage

I started this project expecting to document the bodily work of Tibetan actors. I met with a tradition that not only was steeped in a rich and complex mythological, cultural and religious context that imposed a careful consideration, but also had extensively developed vocal work, for which I had no training. The relative paucity of the gestural language in *lha mo* may be due to the pre-eminence of the text. This is not to say that a body-approach is baseless in the Tibetan context. It is simply unsuitable as an entry point into the world of *lha mo*. Now that the groundwork is done, that the main features of this performing style are understood in their cultural, religious and social context, engaging with the agentive and lived experience of the body in performance will certainly yield innovative results. A phenomenological approach to Tibetan societies is yet to be carried out. Cultural embodiment still largely begs to be understood among Tibetans.

The depiction that has been made here of the *lha mo* world has left out the contemporary historical context.⁴⁵ The last sKyor mo lung actors from before the 1950s have all died, in Tibet as in exile. The

⁴⁵ See Fitzgerald (2014) and Wojahn (2016) for a description of the current situation in Tibet and in exile.

urban amateur troupes of Tibet, who were playing a traditional style of *lha mo* twenty years ago, have now incorporated modern and sinicised performance elements into their shows. Shortened, flashy and pre-arranged 'world heritage' presentations replace earlier long-form flexible performances. Amateur troupes are financially strained, some fearing for their survival. Actors are still very attached to their art form, but interest and attendance plummet, as *lha mo* is challenged, like elsewhere, by modern digital entertainment formats. In exile, *lha mo* enjoys a sustained interest and official support, but the Dharamsala *zho ston* is mostly attended by schoolchildren on mandatory call. As is the case in Tibet, *lha mo* in exile has not been able to avoid folklorisation and the fixed pre-arrangement of performances. In the near future, emblematic *lha mo* techniques such as the singing of *rnam thar*, the three characters of the prologue (hunters, princes and goddesses), and the acrobatic 'big leaps' are not in danger of being lost—they are actually strategically used, among other cultural commodities, to defend the PRC government claims that it protects Tibetan culture. Set in fixed shows mixing various Tibetan and Chinese performance styles, these *lha mo* techniques look Tibetan, but they do not *feel* Tibetan.

Coming back to 'presence', the cornerstone of performance according to Barba, how does it play out in the Tibetan context, since it is not the "raw energy of life itself as manifested in the actor's body", as Riley (1997, p. 316) described it in the Japanese and Chinese art forms? Barba & Savarese (1991, p. 11) do not restrict 'presence' to skills that provoke amazement: more modestly, presence is what sustains the spectators' attention, a form of "communion into what makes us all human".



Fig. 10. Zhol pa troupe performing the play Padma 'od 'bar. The pivotal moment when the hero sacrifices his life. Lhasa, 1998 © Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy.

Shifting the focus to the audience is helpful to understand ‘presence’ on the (traditional) *lha mo* stage. The Tibetan spectators do not share the expectations of Western, Chinese or Japanese viewers. They read *lha mo* performances against a contextual background filled with mythological, religious, philosophical, historical, aesthetic, social and political information. They do not come to performances to discover something new, but on the contrary, to retrieve an experience, to reconnect with something familiar or deeply valued. This privileged connection is reminiscent of *chos mjal* (‘coming to meet the Dharma’, a term used when visiting lamas, monasteries and sacred places). *Chos mjal* is restricted to elevating religious encounters and would be culturally inappropriate in the secular world of the *lha mo ba*. Yet, alongside the banter and the crude jokes, *lha mo* is ambiguously positioned between the sacred and the profane, and does portray heroes and heroines who behave like exemplary religious masters, or figures who are the previous incarnations of the Buddha (Dri med kun ldan) or Padamsambhava (Padma ‘od ‘bar), and who elicit *chos mjal*-like behaviour on the part of some spectators (offering of white ceremonial scarves, prostrations...).

But the connection that is established between actors and audience covers a much wider range of experiences. Spectators recognize on the *lha mo* stage their cherished values, mythologies, modes of speaking and behaving. The ‘presence’ of *lha mo* performers is to *re-present* (to make present again) the flavour (*rasa*) of what is essential, nurturing, uplifting, heartening; of what the spectators believe in and are deeply attached to; of what they feel is slowly disappearing in a rapidly changing world. What French painter Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) said about his art, “The purpose is not to paint life, but to make painting come alive”⁴⁶, can be transposed to Tibetan performance. In *lha mo*, the purpose is not to create the illusion that characters are lifelike, but to make the imaginary world of ordinary Tibetans come alive again.

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