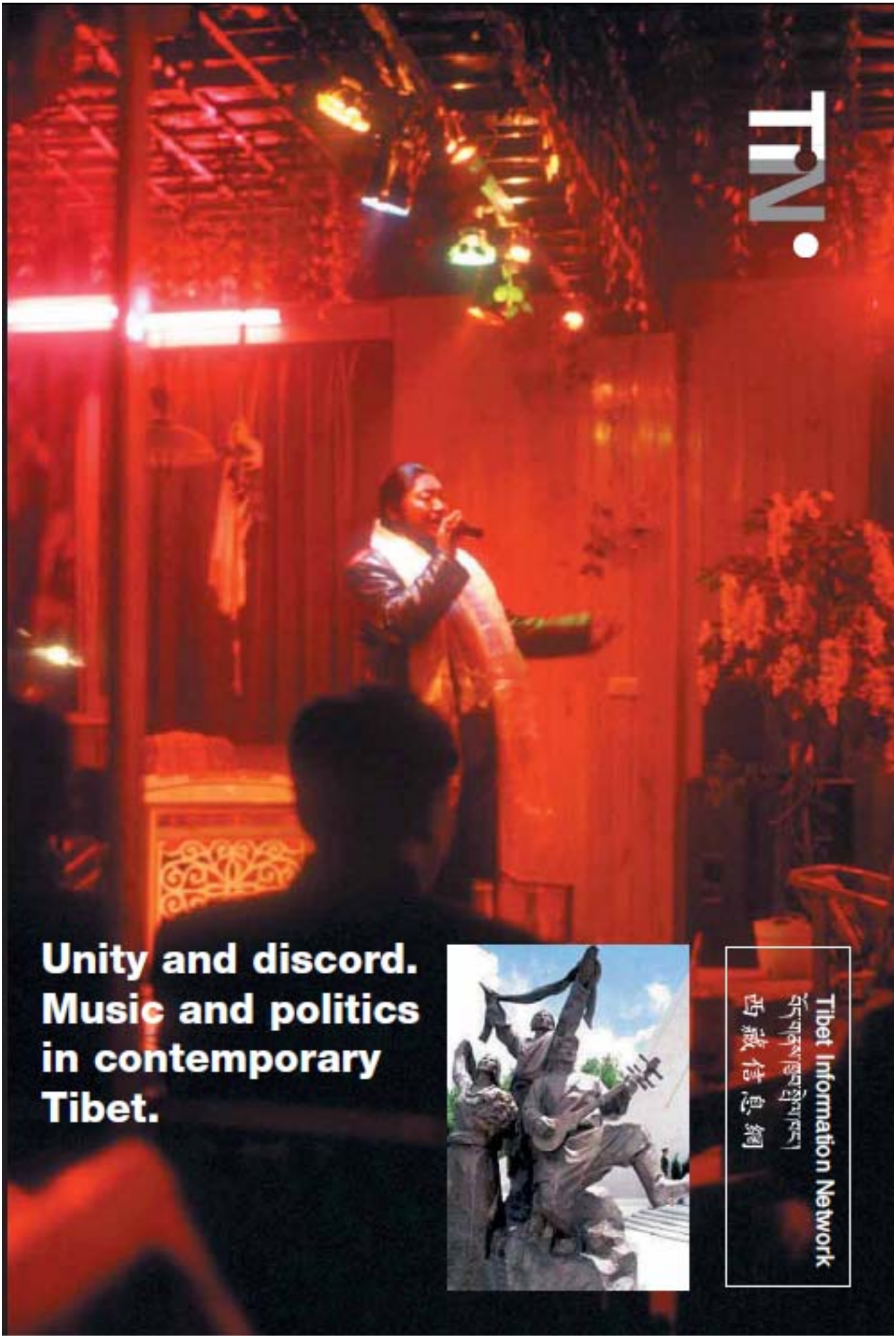

TIN.

Unity and discord. Music and politics in contemporary Tibet.

Tibet Information Network

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Introduction

Chinese rule in Tibetan areas of the People's Republic of China ('Tibet') has resulted in two extreme and deeply entrenched positions held by the Chinese authorities and the Tibetan exile government, and a host of other viewpoints held by Tibetans living in or between Tibet and exile concerning Tibet's political status and cultural identity. Whilst religion and political prisoners have become the focus of the most violent and overt political confrontations in and about Tibet, music has become profoundly involved with the various political standpoints, and has been used by all parties to express ideology and denounce opposing ideology.

This book examines the ways in which non-monastic music has been and is being used to serve politics, or has been changed due to political ideology in Tibet since the 1950s, and some of the consequences of this politicisation on the musical traditions themselves and Tibetan cultural identity. It draws on over 30 formal interviews with Tibetans brought up in Tibet carried out by TIN researchers, as well as a range of published material. This study discusses musical style and performance as well as song lyrics. Although lyrics are the most apparent vehicle for political agenda in music, musical and performance style carry just as potent messages, and have been restricted, controlled and mobilised to serve political ends just as much as lyrics. This book focuses on the politics of music in Tibet, and only discusses the exile situation in the context of the debates over authenticity in Tibetan music and controversies over change and sinicisation. For a comprehensive study of exile musical culture, the reader is referred to Keila Diehl's, *Echoes from Dharamsala: Music in the life of a Tibetan refugee community* (2002).

Unity and Discord does not address Tibetan monastic music, since its instrumental and vocal ritual traditions are largely distinct from Tibetan secular performing arts in terms of history, musical style, performers and context, and would require a separate study. This book is aimed to cater for the broadest possible audience, providing sufficient background for readers new to Tibetan history, politics and music. This inevitably leads to more information than necessary for readers familiar with these topics in certain sections. Chapters one and two in particular are aimed at providing the background on political ideology and culture, and the development of policy and its impact on music in Tibet since 1950.

It must be emphasised that the aim of this book is to illustrate how music has become a political tool in the struggle over Tibet, and not to enter into judgements on the positions of the different sides. The inevitable and quite understandable emotionalising of the issues surrounding contemporary Tibet can hamper an understanding of underlying processes, and terminology has to a certain extent become an instrument of the struggle rather than of analysis. For example, music that supports the Chinese state is known by those who oppose the Chinese regime as 'propaganda', and songs that oppose the Chinese state are known as 'protest songs' or even 'freedom songs'; the first is seen as

an act of manipulation and oppression, the second an act of heroism. In the terminology of the Chinese authorities, there are ‘propaganda’ songs and ‘counter-revolutionary propaganda’ songs, or since the market reforms of the 1980s, songs that ‘endanger state security’. While singing ‘propaganda’ songs is a great patriotic act, counter-revolutionary propaganda is a crime. The terminology is made even more confusing because of the strongly negative connotation of the English word ‘propaganda’ used for the Chinese term *xuan chuan*, which itself has a neutral sense of propagating or disseminating information. The negative connotation of ‘propaganda’ is more equivalent to the Chinese term *xuan yang*, which is used in the context of ‘counter-revolutionary propaganda’. Curiously, the Chinese authorities also translate *xuan chuan* as ‘propaganda’ when presenting material in English, despite the fact that it carries the negative meaning of *xuan yang* in the west. In the absence of neutral language, this book uses a number of terms for songs that praise and oppose the Chinese state, including ‘propaganda’, ‘Chinese patriotic’, ‘protest’, ‘Tibetan patriotic’ and ‘counter-revolutionary’ songs. However, the aim is to analyse and describe the ways in which both sides are using music for their political aims, and to avoid judging whether this is good or bad.

Chapter one introduces the ideologies that were brought to bear on Tibetan music as Tibet came under the control of communist China in 1951. Whatever opinion is held regarding Tibet’s political status prior to 1951, whether it was a fully-fledged independent country, as the Tibetan government-in-exile claims, or ‘an inalienable part of China’, as the Chinese authorities claim, the Chinese presence there was non-existent for the majority of Tibetans before the 1950s. In this sense, it can be stated that the impact of Chinese politics and culture upon, eventually, all levels of Tibetan life, culture and society definitely is a new development. The Chinese, like virtually all people of the world, have long held views about people who are culturally 'other'. These views involve judging other nationalities by their standards, seeing themselves as the norm and the others as outside the norm; themselves as advanced and the others as backwards, uncivilised, strange or exotic. From 1951, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) became the ruling power in Tibet, a pressure was brought upon Tibetans to fit into Chinese ideals of what a people and their culture should be, and these Chinese ideals have been backed up by policy that has been implemented in Tibet. In addition to the question of the control and influence of the majority Han Chinese on the Tibetan minority, as Tibet was ‘liberated’ in 1951 and became ruled by the CCP, it became subject to the very rigid socialist views on what art should be, expounded by Mao Zedong in 1942. However, whilst Tibet came under pressure from socialist ideological and Chinese majority views on culture from 1951 onwards, the constitutions of the PRC have all stated that Tibetans and other minority nationalities have the right to autonomy of their culture.

While chapter one describes the waves of new ideology and thinking that affected Tibet after its alleged ‘liberation’, chapter two describes the development of the actual policies that were implemented in Tibet from 1951 until the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1980s, and the resulting changes in Tibetan musical culture. The socialist theories of art, the pressure of the Han majority and the principle of autonomy as

expressed in the constitutions and other official documents are the main new forces from China that affected Tibet post 'liberation', yet from the 1950s until the present day, there have been drastic variations in the extent to which they entered policy and were actually implemented. During the Cultural Revolution, for example, socialist principles of art were enforced in their most extreme form, yet today, only echoes of the socialist legacy still impinge on the non-religious arts.

Chapter three brings this historical overview up to the present day, examining how music in Tibet has begun to gain independence from the state following the policies of liberalisation and market reform and the advent of new types of media. Chapter three describes today's Tibet, where pop music and musical contexts dependent on the modern media, such as discos and karaoke bars, exist alongside more traditional contexts such as festivals and competitions. It also describes the role of the state musical institutions in the careers of modern Tibetan performers and the political pressures that still exist on music and performers in Tibet.

Chapter four examines the use of music for state propaganda, ranging from revolutionary songs that pound out the Party line and praise its leaders to the widespread media presentation of Tibetans as a singing, dancing, happy race, with the subtext of the Tibetans as childlike and in need of guidance and governance from the Han Chinese. The use of and adaptation of certain musical and performance styles to convey Party ideology and demonstrate its might is also examined. Finally, the chapter questions the effectiveness of these direct or indirect forms of propaganda, drawing on interview material from Tibetans who have grown up in Tibet. A range of propaganda songs are presented in the original Tibetan or Chinese and also in English translation.

Following the review of state propaganda, chapter five focuses on 'counter-revolutionary propaganda' or 'protest songs'. It describes the forms such songs take, the grey area and ambiguity created by the widespread use of metaphor to express sentiments banned by the state, and the ways in which Tibetans have protested through song, ranging from private singing to confrontational singing. As with chapter four, songs are presented in Tibetan or Chinese with English translation.

Finally, chapter six addresses the reactions to the extensive change and in particular, sinicisation of Tibetan musical culture in Tibet, and the existence of an alternative musical culture in Tibetan exile communities. Drawing on interviews with Tibetans recently arrived from Tibet and those born or grown up in India, it presents people's reaction to change in Tibetan music inside and outside Tibet and their views on what Tibetan music is or should be in the context of the omnipresent political struggles over Tibet.

Summary points

- Whatever opinion is held over the political status of Tibet, the 'liberation' of Tibet has resulted in unprecedented change and sinification of Tibetan music in Tibet in all but remote areas. This has led to complex questions over cultural identity and cultural autonomy in Tibet, particularly following the establishment of the exile community from 1959 which has strived to preserve Tibetan traditions.

- Change and sinicisation in Tibetan music in Tibet have been imposed directly by the state through censorship of traditional Tibetan genres and widespread teaching and dissemination of Chinese and Chinese style songs particularly during the Cultural Revolution. The state has also imposed such change by training Tibetan artistes in Chinese techniques, themselves influenced by western techniques, in conservatoires in mainland China through the system of dance troupes. However, since the post-Cultural Revolution era, arguably more profound and widespread sinicisation of Tibetan music in Tibet has occurred through liberalisation and the loosening of state control as well as technological advances and the spread of the mass media, which enabled a pop music culture in Tibet and across the PRC to emerge that is to a great extent independent of the state.

- Up until the end of the Cultural Revolution, the state sought to reinvent all music in the PRC according to Maoist notions of what art should be. In the case of Tibetan and other minority music, the pressure for cultural transformation was far stronger due to ethnocentric Chinese assumptions of the inferiority or backwardness of Tibetan culture. Whilst the influence of socialist ideology on art has largely but not entirely withered away since the 1980s, pressure on Tibetan art still exists through the paternalistic attitude of the Han-dominated state which aims to help 'develop' Tibetan culture.

- Music has formed a core component of state propaganda in the PRC, with mass singing campaigns throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Music has been used to disseminate political ideology through lyrics, and also propagate a sense of socialist 'modernity' with 'Chinese characteristics' through 'developed' styles of music, singing and performance. Music has been widely used more indirectly for propaganda purposes, through the characterisation of the Tibetans, and other minorities, as loving song and dance, suggesting them to be childlike and in need of the state to guide and look after them.

- Music has formed a core component of Tibetan attempts to resist Chinese rule and assert Tibetan identity, with songs that explicitly denounce Chinese rule, and more commonly, songs with metaphorical Tibetan nationalist meaning. The political

repression has led to a climate in which Tibetan nationalist messages are so oblique, that the emphasis for the audience has shifted to interpretation. Thus a sizeable 'grey area' has been created within a political arena that continually attempts to present the situation as black and white.

- The 'liberation' of Tibet has also resulted in the creation of an alternative musical culture in exile, which is as politicised as that in China, yet in different ways. With the Tibetans existing as a minority outside Tibet, the popular music in exile is also prone to influence by the majority cultures of India, Nepal and the west in a similar way to the current Chinese influence on Tibetan popular music.