

“Tibetan popular music...is one of the artistic means through which Tibetans imagine themselves as a nation. It is also a mode of subversive narrative that counters the master narrative of Chinese state power and its colonial conception of Tibetan history and society” (Lama Jabb 1)

“Subversive Tibetan rap” (2)

“Dranyen dunglen” - strumming and singing, accompanied by guitar/mandolin

Identity is defined in part by distinctiveness, and can be established through common objective elements. (3)

- What people are and what they are not
- Find the self within the other

“The lyrics ultimately determine a song’s popularity” (6)

-- allusions to the Tibetan flag, Amnye Machen (snow, by extension its deity)

“Juxtaposition of powerful and prevalent Tibetan symbols both in the lyric and in the visual images that accompany the song on the music video (soaring snow mountains, weeping grasslands, blue skies, the Potala palace, religious gatherings, khatak-offering pilgrims) link this living present to an immemorial past and fuses both with a vision of a better future Tibet.” (10)

- Political aspiration for the stateless nation of Tibet (flag is “ancient and living Tibetan deity”)

Common attachment to a nation or identity of Tibet (and Tibetan language, mocks others)

Reinforces ideal of pureness or authenticity, appealing to deeply embedded emotions (12)

Resistance against assimilation policies of China

- anti fur campaign “simple modern attire”
- territorially integrated Tibet
- garden phodrang, “blissful palace”, 5th dalai lama

“The idea of Tibet as a ‘land of snow’...permeates historical and religious texts, classical and contemporary Tibetan literature, and traditional oral narratives...” (18)

Tibet is an oral society, far transcends textual sources

Idea of Tibetan homeland

“Potala” - abode of Avalokitesvara (needs to have phodrang to be meaningful to illiterate Tibetans)

Jann Ronis

Nithin Raghavan

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Tibetan music is varied and far-reaching, and is especially developed due to the fact that Tibet is a primarily oral society, where spoken words far transcend textual sources (Lama Jabb 18). It is for this reason that many modern-day songwriters write their songs with colloquial language and “catchy melodies”, and avoid complex symbolism, to better reach their target audience of rural Tibetans, of whom few are able to understand such idioms (Lama Jabb 6). Many modern-day songs, especially those written after Deng Xiaoping’s liberalization of society, additionally employ the additional theme of Tibetan nationalism, anti-Chinese colonialism, or contain lyrics that resist Chinese hegemony over Tibetan society. The songs “Gangchenpa” by Dolma Kyap, “Our Flag” by Tsering Topgyal and “Land of Snows” by Dekyi Tsering are excellent examples of modern Tibetan music which perfectly captures these sentiments.

“Gangchenpa” contains many tropes common to modern-day Tibetan music. Dolma Kyap describes Tibet as *gangchen*, the land of snow, a common phrase used to describe the country in oral expressions and religious texts, which alludes to the historical extent and identity of Tibetans, and describes relevant traditional Tibetan symbols, such as the Dalai Lama (whom Dolma Kyap refers to as “lama”), to whom the song indicates continued allegiance through deferential tones, which indicates resistance against the Chinese. Additionally, the artist describes “Their years of joy and sorrow / Are written on the face of Ama”; ‘ama’ being the Tibetan word for mother, and which describes the weathered face of an old mother protecting her children (Tibetans), which further indicates that Tibetans are a single identity, suffering as one.

“Our Flag” is somewhat less cryptic than “Gangchenpa” by explicitly describing Tibetan symbols, such as the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama. Nevertheless, besides its blunt support for the two, it remains rich with symbolism of traditional Tibetan imagery as well. Also referring to Tibet as *gangchen*, the land of snow, to hearken back to the historical Tibetan country, Tsering Topgyal additionally refers to *pho brang potala*; while *potala* is the residence of the Avalokitesvara, songwriters choose to include *pho brang* to provide the meaning to illiterate Tibetans of the Dalai Lama, to whom loyalty also delineates fighting against Chinese oppression (Lama Jabb 16). Tsering Topgyal, perhaps brazenly declares *gangs seng darcha*, the snow lion flag, will rise again; this does not only refer to the Tibetan state with this flag that existed before the Chinese invasion, but also to the rebirth of collective Tibetan spirit, as the flag is an “ancient and living Tibetan deity” (Lama Jabb 10). It thus represents an aspiration for the “stateless nation” of Tibet, existing without sovereign territory, in the minds of Tibetans (Lama Jabb 10).

Finally, “Land of Snows” utilizes not only the lyrics, but the visual imagery of the music video to illustrate snowy mountains, grasslands and blue skies, powerful and prevalent Tibetan symbols that link current Tibet with its great past and a hopeful future; the clothing of Dekyi Tsering is additionally quite modern, and serves to juxtapose this analogy further (Lama Jabb 10). Its lyrics also allude to grasslands, mountains and *gangchen*, the geographic reminders of Tibetan identity; the Dalai Lama, the spiritual reminder of Tibetan identity; as well as describing the collective suffering of the Tibetan people with “we”, the reminder that Tibetan identity does not only consist of memories, but of its living people as well. Ending with “Victory to the Gods”, a common Tibetan phrase, Dekyi Tsering also alludes to the traditional faith which continues to be practised every day by Tibetans, even in the face of Chinese assimilation.