journal of global buddhism

Book Review

Journal of Global Buddhism 5 (2004): 1 - 9

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ISSN 1527-6457

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In his ground breaking book *Prisoners of Shangri-la. Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Donald Lopez (1999) outlines the architecture of a mythological prison from which everything Tibetan seems unable to escape. The present image of Tibet, Lopez argues, is supported by a romantic wish that the Tibetans somehow hold the power to save the Western world from its cynical and materialist self by restoring its spirit. All things Tibetan seems to fit into this mould, making the Tibetans the "teddy bears" of the modern world. Other observers, such as Dodin & Ræther (1997) have named this syndrome "Mythos Tibet" pointing to the impact of the myth on Tibetan self-identity as well as on the Tibet researchers themselves. The mechanism of this myth is neatly captured

by the cover of Lopez's book; a photograph of a Tibetan monk wearing robes and a pair of shades. Looking at the photo one cannot help feeling that it is inappropriate for a monk to wear the shades (Magnusson 2002). A similar perception is apparent in the happy crowd of Western visitors congregating in the exile Tibetan headquarters in Dharamsala, in north India, where one can hear comments like: "I can't get over the sight of Tibetans driving cars!"

Mythos Tibet makes it hard to write academically about Tibet and the Tibetans today. Reading American anthropologist Keila Diehl's book about the exile Tibetan soundscape, *Echoes from Dharamsala: Music in the life of a Tibetan Refugee Community*, I was again reminded of its spell. In her extensive study Diehl looks at the power of music in the re-creation of Tibetan culture in exile. But despite her attempts to get square with the myth, I can't help finding myself trapped in Lopez's prison: the exotic sight and sound of Tibetans playing amplified rock music in the shadow of the Himalayas. Perhaps unintentionally, Diehl begs for the readers' attention by telling us what an unlikely setting an Indian village is for rock and roll, and how perplexed she was the first time she heard a Tibetan singing the blues.

Leaving the spell of the prison aside, it must be emphasized that *Echoes from Dharamsala* is an ambitious book that takes the reader deep inside the Tibetan exile community and explores the tension between a political strategy of cultural preservation and an active dialogue between local and global flows of cultural expressions. Diehl's study can be divided into three major parts. The first part discusses how Tibetan cultural heritage is reconstructed in exile. The second investigates the exile community's relationship to the popular music of Indian so-called "Hindi" films. The third part is an ethnographic study of an exile Tibetan rock band called the Yak Band, a band in which Diehl herself sometimes

played keyboard during her fieldwork.

Music, just as any kind of Tibetan exile cultural expression, has to be contextualized within an exile Tibetan official paradigm of cultural preservation, Diehl argues. This paradigm has become something of an iron cage (another prison?) from which new cultural expressions seem unable to escape. Cultural activities in the exile society are often used as means in the battle against Chinese influence in Tibet and to minimize the risk of exile Tibetans disappearing into their host societies. The official position here is that pre-Chinese occupation Tibetan practices are more authentic and traditional than what goes on culturally in present day Tibet. In fact, many exile Tibetans perceive themselves as more Tibetan than the sinicized Tibetans living in Tibet. Recent arrivals from the homeland are often seen more as a liability than as a cultural resource. In the context of religion the Chinese authorities' control over of monastic administration has bred a deep-rooted suspiciousness against institutionalized Buddhism in Tibet. The last decade's battle between "Tibetan" and "Chinese" reincarnations of important religious leaders is a case in point.

Diehl asserts that what is represented as pre-1950 Tibetan culture is not a factual past that can be upheld and constantly re-implemented in exile, but something that, in reality, is continuously reconstructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. In that sense the efforts of the exile-Tibetans to stay the same may actually be as innovative as they are conservative. One of her important points is that the cultural preservation paradigm has professionalized the reconstructive practices. Trained experts select and nourish certain cultural elements as authentic and discard others. Ordinary people more often become spectators than participants in public cultural activities.

Other researchers have noted how "authentic" cultural elements appear to have been manufactured quite recently, such as the image of Tibetan society as traditionally eco-friendly (Huber 1995). Within the context of Tibetan Buddhism, one finds an innovative Gelugpa modernism. A good example is the XIV Dalai Lama's way of rephrasing Tibetan Buddhist doctrine into modern concepts such as "universal responsibility" (see, for instance Gyatso 1988) and introducing it as a part of a new global ethic (Dalai Lama 1999). Another is the fusion of liberal democratic and Buddhist doctrine in the exile community's democratization project (Magnusson 1999).

Diehl's study works theoretically from the idea that music/songs operate as "sonic icons of places," and that modern Tibetan exile music is created from three major sources/places: Tibetan music as it is remembered by the exiles, contemporary Hindi music, and contemporary Western music. Like the recent arrivals, contemporary Tibetan music is considered to be too sinicized and is discarded.

In India, popular Hindi songs have become the cherished everyday music of most exile Tibetans. But how is this justified in relation to the cultural preservation paradigm? Diehl argues that the exiles separate their cultural sphere and personal identity into a traditional identity and a modern identity. They can thus pursue new and modern ways without jeopardizing the traditional. Her point here is that exile Tibetans are freer to experiment with Indian tradition than with the Tibetan tradition they are supposed to preserve and protect. Another important distinction made about the paradigm is that it is acceptable for a Tibetan in exile to display a personal passion for Hindi songs, but it is not acceptable to express it collectively in public as a community preference.

Just as the Hindi songs are an important part and icon of the exile

Tibetan soundscape, so too is Western rock music, Diehl continues. During her fieldwork in India she was met by a Western rock song in every exile Tibetan place she went. An interesting detail is that almost all of the rock songs she mentions, both the ones she heard and the ones she played with the Yak Band, were from the 1970s. Why this was the case remains unexplained in the book. Perhaps it is because the best songs were written during that decade? Seriously, these days trance and hip-hop (which, if one does not care about place of origin, are global), rather than the retro-Western music of the 70s, have taken the field. A new period of fieldwork would perhaps reveal an altered soundscape.

Although definitely considered an inauthentic public expression, Tibetan-made rock music has been justified in the community by its contribution to popular awareness and activism, and through its political and nationalistic lyrics. Much of the early exile Tibetan rock music originated in the government-sponsored Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA). For instance, one of the modern evergreens is the former TIPA director Jamyang Norbu's Tibetan text to Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land." TIPA also produced the first modern record, an EP including the popular love song "Dzaypa'i Rinzin Wangmo" (Beautiful Rinzin Wangmo). Dharamsala was the scene of more loosely organized rock bands, such as the legendary Vajra Hammer, drawing members from Western Buddhists living in the area. Although there were some independent projects such as Rangzen Shönu (Freedom Youth) and Ultra Vires (based in Darjeeling, in West Bengal), the first established exile Tibetan rock band was the TIPA based Ah-Ka-Ma Band. What was unique about this band was its mix of traditional Tibetan instruments with the basic rock combo line-up (guitar-bass-drums), and its "official" cultural status. The band was often hired to perform at different community events.

In an interesting chapter, Diehl analyzes the role of language in the cultural preservation paradigm, and how it conditions the crafting of song lyrics in exile. I will briefly mention one of these conditions here. The invention of literary Tibetan as a vehicle for translating Buddhist texts from Sanskrit gives the Tibetan language a distinct sacred quality, Diehl argues. Apart from being the script that made Buddhist texts available to Tibet in the seventh century, a number of syllables are used in esoteric chants and mantras. When spoken or sung they become "sonorous icons" to laypeople who are unaware of their secret meanings. In this capacity the icons ritually confirm the exile community's identity. It is thus crucial for a songwriter to get the words right, and without any formal errors. Given that most exiles have to struggle with their literary Tibetan or simply do not know it, songwriters often have to turn to individuals who are proficient in literary Tibetan. Today, most of them are older religious scholars or nobility. In her fieldwork, Diehl discovered that many of the lyrics of the Tibetan rock songs were in fact written as perfect, formal poetry by scholars such as, for example, the distinguished Drepung Geshe, and former abbot of Tharpa Choling Monastery in Kalimpong, India, Ngawang Jinpa, and that understanding the meaning of the lyrics is often far beyond the linguistic capacity of ordinary exile Tibetans.

Personally, I find Diehl's brief history of modern Tibetan music one of the most useful parts of her book, and only wish that it had been more extensive. But Diehl has chosen to focus this part of her study on the story of one of the bands. It was started as The Snow Lions by Tibetan soldiers enlisted in the Indian army. After leaving the army, the band resettled in Dharamsala, started a cable-TV business, and changed its name to The Yak Band. The band's career culminated in a series of concerts during the 1995 Kalacakra initiation in the Tibetan settlement Mungod, in south India. Gradually giving in to the audience's preference

for Hindi songs rather than nationalistic Tibetan rock songs, the band ended up being subjected to a devastating critique for "selling out" to Indian pop culture and this eventually led to its break-up.

In Diehl's analysis, the band's performance of Hindi songs in public violated the official paradigm of cultural preservation, and the band was punished for it. The exile Tibetan love of Hindi songs should have been kept at a private and individual level, and should never have been expressed in public.

Diehl's explanation for the fall of The Yak Band is competent but put into the context of the global market for popular music where bands and artists come and go according to trends in styles, the waning of its fame and consequent break-up is not exceptional. When I recently visited a Tibetan settlement in South India, I tried to compare the experiences of the exiles themselves with Diehl's analysis, only to find that most of the people I asked did not really remember The Yak Band very well. Instead it was the JJI Exile Brothers' new album that was being dubbed "a new style of Tibetan song" and labeled as "Tibetan blues" (compare TibetNet 2003). Formed in 1998, JJI Exile Brothers released the album on the Dalai Lama's birthday, and describe their music as a weapon to raise awareness of the plight of the Tibetans.

What I miss in *Echoes from Dharamsala* is a critical analysis of the writer's own role in her study. For one thing, there is something disturbing about an anthropologist joining a rock band to do fieldwork. Somehow this seems just as likely as a paleontologist joining The Stones for purely scientific purposes. Moreover, Diehl never systematically discusses how her own participation in the band, performing in public with it, and hanging out with its members, affected the exile community's perception of the band and its music. It is not very likely

that her presence passed unremarked. But in this area the reader is left with a number of unanswered questions: Did her appearance on stage, dressed up in a traditional Tibetan dress, lend credibility or credulity to the band? Did it reinforce any un-Tibetan influences in its music? Diehl wants to generalize about modern Tibetan music from the story of The Yak Band, but it is also possible that her contribution to the band was to make it different from others.

What stands out in *Echoes from Dharamsala* is the remarkable tension between the "tyranny" of the cultural preservation paradigm and a creative, aspiring, politically conscious music making use of the rock format. The policing of dissident expressions can be ardent, and often mutilating to cultural innovation.

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