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FROM "DEVIL DANCE" TO "WORLD HEALING": SOME REPRESENTATIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND INNOVATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY TIBETAN RITUAL DANCES*

by

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Introduction

At the beginning of this century Western scholars and travelers often referred to Tibetan ritual dances (*'cham*) as "devil dances" because of the fierce appearance of some of the masked characters.¹ Until the 1960s such dances were also designated as "mystery plays," thereby comparing them with ancient Greek phenomena.² From the 1970s they began to be called "secret" or "magic" dances, while nowadays they are more simply described by scholars as "masked ritual dances."³ Nevertheless, in recent American popular representations Tibetan ritual dances seem to have regained their mystical character, being portrayed not only as "sacred" but also as contributing to "world healing." *'Cham* is commonly described as a public form of Tibetan ritual dance, performed for a lay audience by monks dressed in colorful costumes and masks mainly representing the protectors of religion (*chos-skyong/bon-skyong*) and their assistants, as well as the figures of the "Black Hats" or "Tantrists" (*zhva-nag* or *sngags-pa*). Such ritual dances are usually a public and culminating part of bigger religious rituals or festivals, especially during the Tibetan New Year.⁴ With the advent of the Tibetan diaspora, not only *'cham* but various Tibetan religious and secular performance traditions have increasingly been staged in, and modified according to, a range of new settings that are very different from the premodern context of ethno-

* *Acknowledgments.* I would like to thank my field consultants Ven. Sangye Tenzin Jongdong, Lopön Tenzin Namdak, Tenzin Wangyal, dance-master Mentrul Lodoe Nyima, as well as Geshe Nyima Dakpa, Samten Karmay and Per Kvaerne for explanations of Bonpo rituals and dances, and also for general help and encouragement. I also wish to express my gratitude to the dance group of Kopan monastery for sharing their knowledge and experiences with me. Thanks to Toni Huber for critical editing and for providing me with several references. I would also like to thank Lesley Rhodes and Veronika Ronge for supplying me with useful material. I am grateful to Martijn van Beek for information about *'cham* performances for tourists in Ladakh.

¹ See, for example, Combe (1989); Waddell (1959); Pott (1958); Howell-Smith (1941).

² See, for example, Rock (1928) and Hermanns (1956).

³ See Norbu (1984) and Olschak (1972).

⁴ Generally, it is up to a monastery's finances, the availability of a lay sponsor and other conditions whether a ritual dance is performed for the community or not. It can also depend on the availability of dance books and/or experienced ritual dance masters and dancers as well as on the general orientation and interest of the abbot of a monastery. The content and purpose of a *'cham* depends first upon the tradition of a sect, then on the performing monastery's history and importance, the location (village or city), the date of performance and the ritual cycle of which it is a part. The usual statements about the general purpose of a *'cham* for a lay audience represent the viewpoint of the clergy; that is, *'cham* is performed for the edification or religious education of the lay people, for accumulating merit and foremost for the exorcism of evil forces. While this is true, it neglects other aspects that are important for the lay audience as individuals and the community as a whole.

graphic Tibet. These include ritual dance and music, sand mandala construction, folk dance as well as opera and monastic chanting.

Performance traditions such as ritual dances are a powerful vehicle for the objectification and representation of culture. They can convey constructions of identity and notions of "tradition." Performances can also serve to demonstrate cultural authenticity. Moreover, they can even be used in subtle ways for political legitimation. The relatively portable nature of performance genres can also be conveniently adapted to different contexts. As representatives of particular cultural and national identities, dancers or dance troupes have long been dispatched out to the rest of the world by various organizations or states. Throughout the world, particularly but not exclusively in larger cities, there now exists a global performance marketplace for the display and consumption of "world culture," in which dance traditions figure prominently in a growing network of "events": tours, exhibitions, concerts, staged religious rituals, and so on. Over approximately the last decade Tibetan ritual dance troupes have entered this cultural marketplace. Monks from Tibetan monasteries in exile have started to present their dance traditions on the global stage to Western audiences in order to display their culture, promote their religious traditions and to raise funds for their monasteries. Virtually all of these new contexts for performance have arisen out of necessity; namely, the fundamental changes in the economic strategies of exiled monastic communities.⁵ In Tibetan exile communities, as well as in regions inhabited by ethnic Tibetans like Ladakh, some 'cham performances are also explicitly staged for tourists or the performers' Indian hosts.

Such performances are not the first time ritual dances from the Tibetan-speaking world have been used as objects of display in encounters with foreign audiences. In 1924 a British filmmaker and Everest explorer secretly organized a „devil dance“ performance by Tibetan lamas for a British audience in London against the explicit wishes of Tibetan authorities not to stage religious dances abroad. While the British Press reacted with orientalist stereotypes – such as "Bishop to Dance on Stage ... Music from Skulls" and "Tom-Tom Ceremonies from the Himalayas" (Hansen 1996: 729) – the Dalai Lama considered it a direct affront to Tibetan religion. The event had severe repercussions for Anglo-Tibetan relations during the period. Visiting British colonial officials were received and honored with specially staged dances in Bhutan during the 1930s and 1940s. Michael Aris has noted that on such occasions the main teacher (*dpon-slob*) was capable of "easily adjusting their originally divine or military purpose into that of secular display" (1994: 130).⁶ In our consideration of Tibetan dances in such a context, we need to rethink the value normally placed upon notions of "authenticity" and "culture" as objectified, structured totalities. Instead, we need to examine such "intercultural transactions" as social events and as distinct forms of cultural mediation (Myers 1994: 693). I therefore intend to focus mainly upon representations, motivations and perceptions of organizers, actors and audiences in this essay. I will discuss aspects of the performance of ritual dances as they now occur in the recently established Tibetan refugee communities of north India and in other new global contexts. In so doing, I wish to draw mostly upon two bodies of data: 1) my observations of a so-called "Guest 'Cham," which is explicitly performed for the local Indian population living around the Tibetan exile Bonpo community established at Dolanji, and 2)

⁵ This is my field consultant's consensus concerning the purpose of staging 'cham in the West. It is also stated as such in the promotional materials of Tibetan exile ritual dance troupes. As far as I know, no Tibetan monks from China have performed ritual dances in the West to date.

⁶ In 1980 the Bhutanese royal dancers and musicians presented for the first time a tour in the United States, five years after the Tibetan Institute for Performing Arts (TIPA) from Dharamsala, India had made the initial step of performing Tibetan folk opera and traditional dances in the West.

materials concerning tours of Tibetan ritual dance troupes in the global arena. In addition, I will also include some notes about perceptions of Tibetan ritual dance performances in contemporary Tibet as they are represented in Chinese media.⁷

The Guest 'Cham in Dolanji

The need to modify traditional performance schedules in the staging of ritual dances at new venues for foreign audiences has become a recurrent theme for Tibetan exile dance troupes. Sometimes in Tibetan exile communities as well, 'cham is staged according to the intended audience's schedule of free time. For example, the Bonpo monks from the exile monastery of Menri (*sMan-ri*) located in Dolanji,⁸ perform a Guest 'Cham for the local Indian community on the first or second Sunday of the first Tibetan month. New Year is considered to be a "great time" (*dus chen*) for communal celebrations and important rituals, including ritual dances.⁹ It is also one of the rare occasions on which the Bonpo exile community gathers together for a communal event. The Tibetan lay population of Dolanji fluctuates greatly throughout the year, mainly due to economic reasons. The villagers usually spend their time away from Dolanji for occupational reasons. A good portion of the residents are scattered throughout India's cities, where they study or sell sweaters to make an income. Many of them thus return around New Year to visit their families and celebrate the holiday together. At such festive times Dolanji's monastery acts as the pivot for the whole Bonpo community. As the head Bon monastery, it is at the same time a guarantor of the maintenance and reinforcement of the Bon religious tradition. By extension, the monastery anchors Bon identity for all Bonpos in India, Nepal and even Tibet.

Most of the dances of the Guest 'Cham are very entertaining and lively. Although I am not certain, the ones I have witnessed were most likely selected specifically for presentation to outsiders. Many different figures take part in it: stags (*sha-ba*), skeletons (*ging*), *A-tsa-ra* and deities like the animal headed twenty-seven sisters belonging to the Bon cosmology (*gZe-ma dgu*, *Gyad-mo dgu* and *sPar-ma dgu*). High ranking deities were represented in dances such as the *Sri-rgyal dus-drug 'cham*, *Ma-rgyud tshog-'cham* and *gShen-rab dgu-'cham*. The dances are all based upon ritual texts.¹⁰ However, their performances during the Guest 'Cham are not embedded in a wider ritual context. The only rituals involved are rites of invocation and veneration for the deities involved in the performance. In a sense, even though this type of 'cham performance might have become secularized, a modern, "invented" tradition resulting from the dramatic social, cultural and economic changes of Tibetans in exile, it still contains religious significance for Bon practitioners in the audience. Some of the Tibetans in attendance venerated the higher ranking deities dancing in the courtyard with incense and ceremonial silk scarves (*kha-btags*), while elder villagers recited ritual formulae with their rosaries during the performance. The entire Tibetan audience circumambulated the temple (*dgon-pa*) during the pauses. Tibetan women

⁷ These notes will be very preliminary, however, because I have no first-hand experience of the conditions and contexts of Tibetan ritual dances as they are now performed in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and the Tibetan populated areas of China. This is partly the object of my forthcoming fieldwork in East Tibet during 1996.

⁸ Following a valuable suggestion by Per Kvaerne, I did fieldwork during February/March of 1995 in this community to document the New Year celebrations and the performances of 'cham.

⁹ In Dolanji, besides the Guest 'Cham, another ritual dance is performed at the time of New Year as part of the *dGug-tor* ritual on the 29th of the 12th Tibetan month. The main purpose is an expulsion of evil forces accumulated throughout the year. On that occasion complex purification rituals are also performed in which the audience takes an active part.

¹⁰ For a short description of some of these dances, see Karmay (1986).

from the village of Dolanji sold *momos* (homemade dumplings) and other snacks on behalf of the monastery to the audience.

Unlike similar situations in Tibet prior to 1959, the monastery at which I observed the performance paid for the expenses associated with the staging of the Guest 'Cham. Monastic officials also arranged for the distribution of free tea and traditional New Year cakes (*kha-zes*). Although the refreshments were provided for everyone's consumption, the intention was to feed the poorer class of Indians in attendance.¹¹ The latter were seated separately in one of the corners of the monastic courtyard and the Tibetan villagers at the performance were gathered in small groups apart from the monks who were not directly engaged in the ritual. While the highest ranking monks of the monastery sat on the veranda of the abbot's house, some specially invited Indian guests from a nearby university and others from the Himalayan region of Kinnaur (who are popularly believed to share a common and ancient history with the Bonpos), were given honorary seats on a high balcony above the abbot's house overlooking the dance ground. Some of them were invited to drink tea in the abbot's house during the pauses. At the end of the dance performance, to the amusement of the audience, some yak and tiger dancers tried to escape masked herders waving whips or provoked attending dogs to run after them. The Kinnauri guests then performed a local row dance (*Shon*) in the monastery's courtyard to the accompaniment of recorded Kinnauri folk music broadcast over a loudspeaker. The abbot explained to me that these interval dances are associated with Bon history, since they are mentioned in the biography of *sTon-pa gShen-rab Mi-bq* the founder of the Bon religious tradition.

These aspects of the "politics of performance" demonstrate the importance of this special kind of 'cham as a social and cultural event, a link established by a refugee community with its hosts in order to maintain a good relationship with the local population and reinforce historical bonds between their religion and the local Indian context. As a community event for the Bonpos, the event reiterates their religious identity within a specific cosmology. This communal aspect is quite an important one, considering the marginalized position of the Tibetan Bonpos within the Tibetan exile community both in terms of religious and regional differences as well as in their marginal situation as Tibetans in exile.¹² In addition to the Indian guests, a few tourists and an organized group of American "guests" also attended the 'cham performed in 1995. The latter were American converts to Bon, and they were guided by a monk from the local monastery who is now living and teaching in the United States.¹³ During their stay, they received Bon teachings and also acted as sponsors to the monastery. Throughout the dance performance they (like a senior monk from the monastery and myself) actively photographed the event with expensive camera equipment. This contrasted markedly with the other Indian "guests" viewing from the exclusive balcony or grouped in a corner waiting for their free tea and cakes.

¹¹ However, lay donations were given during the time of New Year at various other occasions. Lay people from Amdo told me in interviews that some of the wealthier families used to sponsor a whole 'cham in the past. They were therefore acknowledged at the time of the performance with victory banners and special escorts.

¹² On this issue see the works of Cech (1987) and Richmond (1992).

¹³ Interestingly, as part of the current representation of missionary Bon in the United States, the traditional "shamanic" tasks of healing and purifying associated with the ancient Tibetan priests termed Bon, as recorded in the Dunhuang texts, for example, seem to have been highlighted and reinterpreted today for a Western audience. See the Voice of Clear Light (1995).

'Cham in the West

Initially invited to a festival of ritual and liturgy in France in 1983, a group of 15 Bonpo monks from the same monastery left their community in Dolanji to perform their ritual dances for the first time in Europe. The organization of their performance tour seems to be quite representative of the staging and modifications required of Tibetan ritual dances in the West.¹⁴ The Menri monks were explicitly requested by the French organizers to perform the dances as they did in their monastery, as "authentically" as possible. Nevertheless, the European expectations of normal performance duration for entertainment (such as movies, theater and dance pieces) necessitated a radical reduction of the usually day-long *'cham* performance down to about two hours. The abbot Ven. Sangye Tenzin Jongdong, himself a former dance master (*'cham-dpon*), had edited the program specifically for a Western audience; that is, certain dance sequences were shortened and put together in a new order. The broader ritual context had therefore to be omitted as well.¹⁵ After the troupe's arrival in France the organizers wanted them to change their program again. As many varieties of monastic life as possible were to be shown now, including chanting, instrumental music and debating. The reason given by them was the assumption "that a Western audience would find it hard to follow dances which, by nature, are long and slow" (Cech 1984: 7). On their tour through Europe the monks from Dolanji were further invited to perform their traditional arts in churches, museums and concert halls. They also had the chance to live in Christian monasteries. This provided an opportunity for intercultural spiritual exchange. According to the abbot of Dolanji, the exchange was not only appreciated by the Bon monks but also by their Christian counterparts. The group was later invited to Canada in 1993. The organizers once again asked the monks to perform only short passages of music, dance, chanting and debate. The dancemaster stated that the dance pieces became so short that even the audience requested longer sequences. The tour appears to have been successful; ceremonial scarves and incense were sold, as were a set of *'cham* masks.¹⁶

In contrast to the above example, the recent (1994) performance of another group of Tibetan Buddhist exiled monks from Nepal was squeezed in between two Free Jazz groups for a one hour performance as part of the Berlin Jazz Festival.¹⁷ The dancers were given no idea of the context in which they would have to perform prior to the actual dancing. The alienation they experienced became clear when a radio journalist asked them in a live interview why they would perform at a jazz festival. They felt very embarrassed because they had never even heard of jazz prior to their engagement in Berlin. Nevertheless, for the organizers it seemed completely logical in terms of the Western classification of "brass music" to invite a Tibetan "brass band" to this festival. The officially declared "missing link" had been created by citing the inspiration from Tibetan ritual music received by Don Cherry, an innovative jazz musician who was billed to appear at the festival. Accompanying them, as well as being part of the audience, I had the impres-

¹⁴ As per my interviews with monks from different performing exile monasteries. For a description of the 1983 tour, see Cech (1984).

¹⁵ A participating monk told me that on another occasion they did not have any time for doing most of the preliminary invocation rituals because the audience was already waiting for them.

¹⁶ The abbot of Menri Monastery, who was not accompanying the dance group at that time, regretted the incident deeply. "Those masks were made by a good artist who died and were irreplaceable," he told me. He did not like the newly made ones so much, which are now used for their performances.

¹⁷ I was employed as a guide to accompany the troupe during their one day visit to Berlin. They performed on June 17th, 1994 during a program called "Jazz Across the Border" at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

sion that the dancers themselves, in addition to most of the viewers, were also not capable of fitting these two incongruous genres – Free Jazz and Tibetan ritual dance and music – together.

The performance consisted of ten minute segments of various dances. Some chants were intoned by the attending musicians during pauses created to allow the performing monks to change their costumes and masks. While the monks were changing, a German Tibetan Buddhist nun and the secretary of the monastery explained the sacred character of the dances to the audience. The senior monastic scholar accompanying the group stated that none of the rituals associated with the dance could be performed anymore because it would require days to do them properly. Improperly performed rituals would also create obstacles.¹⁸ Nowadays the troupe also dances faster because "the people want more action."¹⁹ After the performance was over, the German secretary managing the group concluded that they would have to become more "professional" in order to really make a financial benefit.

Despite all of the modifications, and even the complete lack of ritual context, 'cham dances in the West are still represented as "authentic" and "ancient" traditions. The promoters generally stress their sacred character and the spiritual benefits for the audience. Program leaflets emphasize the traditional origin and purpose of the dances, which results in a generally receptive response from the audience.²⁰ For instance, a French newspaper wrote: "The liturgical ceremony...possessed an intensity, an emotional power which mysteriously moved the foreign audience even though it was a ceremony of which the rules, the symbols and practices completely escaped us" (Cech 1984: 15). One common European public discourse on Tibetan religious culture reveals itself at such moments. Romantic phrases such as "archaic rites of a time when man was not completely isolated from the rest of creation," or "all this evoked a lost or forgotten world" (ibid.) are representative of how Westerners still tend to essentialize and mystify Tibetan culture.

'Cham for "World Healing"

The following example of the "world tour" by a group of Buddhist monks from one of the biggest Gelugpa monasteries in Indian exile, Drepung Loseling, indicates the increase of 'cham performances for Western audiences. It also suggests a changing representation of Tibetan ritual dance in the United States. On their first tour in 1988/89 the monks had already performed in 130 North American and European cities. Sponsored by the Canada Tibet Friendship Society and Tibet House in New York, their tour was officially billed as "Sacred Music Sacred Dance for World Peace." Six years later their fifth "world tour" was announced as follows: "Once again they will visit over a hundred cities, drawing from their traditional temple music and dances to create an arrangement of pieces believed to generate energies conducive to world healing" (*Snow Lion Newsletter* 1995: 10). Likewise, the World Tibetan News Network on the Internet in April 1995 provided the following announcement: "Tibetan Monks in Ohio to Heal the

¹⁸ These ritual actions are, for example, the consecration of a sacred space for the dance-ground. On this issue, see Schrempf (1994). Myers (1994: 684) states a similar problem encountered by two Australian aboriginal artists performing ritual sandpainting for a Western audience. There was a "spiritual danger of misperformance" for them because usually only initiated men would take part in these ritual activities. According to them, it would have caused a violation of the rules of display, the sacred nature of the ritual.

¹⁹ This happens also with 'cham performed in exile communities, according to him. Tethong (1979: 21) observed this tendency already in Tibet before 1959.

²⁰ See, for example, a program leaflet published by the Tibet Foundation called Sacred Dance and Sacred Music. UK Tour of Sera Med Monastery in May 1995.

World." Other American promotions cite Tibetan ritual dance performances in the West more generally as contributing to the world healing and peace movement, generating a greater awareness of the "endangered" Tibetan civilization, and raising support for the refugee community in India. Interestingly, these purposes are all mentioned together as if they would condition each other.

Tibetan sacred dance as a healing ritual is actually not a cultural "invention" designed solely for American audiences, as one might be tempted to think. Next to being a meditational practice for the monk dancers, one of the traditional purposes of a *'cham* is a general purification from and destruction of evil forces threatening the community. The 5th Dalai Lama had also once commented that *'cham* has the ability to completely transform the mind of the onlooker. (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976: 227). Additionally, it is an invocation of good fortune and well-being, a notion which can be easily reinterpreted to suit any audience's taste. The *Tibet House Drum* wrote, for example, "this sacred dance performance is said to contribute to healing in the listener and planetary harmony" (1993: 7). It seems that since the mid 1980s performances of Tibetan rituals in the West have been represented in connection with the themes of global peace and healing. Another well-known example, and perhaps the precursor of this label, is the representation of the *Dus-'khor dbang-chen* (Great Kālacakra Initiation) ritual given by the present Dalai Lama as "Kālacakra for World Peace," which was apparently announced as such for the first time in 1985 (Dorjee 1985). What used to be exclusively a higher Tibetan tantric initiation, became, in fact, the biggest Buddhist tantric ritual for a public audience, all in the name of "world peace."²¹ It seems that one of the traditional roles of the lama as healer and balancer of supernatural forces has shifted from a rather locally based community to an embodiment of Tibetan spirituality in a global arena of performance spaces encompassing the West. Therefore, the monk's self-proclaimed assertion of "tradition," through an uninterrupted lineage of masters and disciples, also serves as their legitimation and fits together well with the romanticized Western images of Tibet.

*'Cham in Contemporary Tibet*²²

In contrast to these representations we can compare current Chinese statements on Tibetan ritual dances in English publications promoting the Chinese state's version of Tibetan life and culture. For example, regarding the appearance of one of the general figures in *'cham*, *Hva shang* (Chin. monk), in a Tibetan ritual dance at Tashilhunpo, he is described as "an old monk in Han costume followed by six smaller monks" (Dongfan 1993: 23). According to the report, "The portrayal of these Han monks in the Cham dance signified that their enduring contribution is not forgotten in Tibet and the desire that all ethnic groups live in 'unity' (ibid.). While in Tibetan exile and in the West representations of Tibetan dance and music center on "authenticity" and "unbroken traditions" said to contribute to global healing and peace, in Tibet itself performing arts appear to be officially claimed by the Chinese state as a part of cultural "development."

The Tibetan Song and Dance Ensemble and the Tibetan Traditional Music Art Troupe from Lhasa, for example, promote themselves as follows: "While taking traditional origin of art as its rich resources, the Ensemble adheres [sic] the *principle of development*, putting the traditional

²¹ The 14th Dalai Lama has made various statements in an interview about the effects of the Kalachakra initiation, such as "We believe that Kalachakra Tantra reduces tension, is good for mental peace and through that way for world peace" (Information Office 1986: 154).

²² Here I can only give a small glimpse of the vast and largely unresearched field of Tibetan ritual dance in the context of modern Tibet.

music onto the stage. The goal is to pursue a more profound, more expressive and more typical Tibetan sound of music" (emphasis added, Ministry for Culture of the PRC 1989: 1). In the promotional leaflet one sees a conductor dressed in a monk's robe conducting a "suite" in front of a monastic orchestra.²³ Yet unlike Tibetan traditional theater, opera and folk songs, ritual dance seems to have escaped former Chinese policies of "assimilation" (Meserve & Meserve 1979: 106).²⁴ Instead, in some monasteries 'cham performances now appear to be part of a state controlled and sponsored "ethnic tourism." As T.S. Oakes has stated, there is a revival of rituals and festivals taking place in Tibetan populated areas of present-day China. He argues that this can be seen as an actual expression of a reconstruction of localized identity which serves as a link "between local society and the wider world" (1993: 63). Dru Gladney, however, stresses that the objectification of minority culture through the majority media only seldom allows the minority people to exploit this for their own benefit. Chinese discourse about the construction of minority and "Han" majority identities centers on "difference" and "exoticism" of the "Other"; that is, the minorities. "Minority" dances and music play a major role in this process. According to him, this representation of minorities as "backward exotics" is used to create a majority nation of imagined "Han people representing progressive modernity" (Gladney 1994).

Outlook

Changing political, economic and social interests, as well as radical transformations in the living conditions of the actors and the audience, all necessitate innovations of publicly performed Tibetan ritual dances. In Tibetan exile and in Tibet itself, as well as in the West, 'cham performances – as rituals in general – have been shortened in a process of adaptation. In Tibet, prior to 1959, many rituals, including 'cham, were performed for one week or more. Now they are reduced to half that time. They also seem to be currently staged faster and less frequently. In a recent issue of the magazine *China's Tibet*, a Chinese commentator stated that the reduction of a festival with 'cham at Tashilhunpo monastery from two weeks to three days was needed "to fit in with the tight living and workings [sic] rhythm of contemporary people" (Dongfan 1993: 22). But ritual traditions have also been modified in terms of their performance time in exile.²⁵ Some of the reasons given by my informants are the immense costs required for the performance of large rituals and the lack of patience on the part of young monks. In addition, numerous dance manuals appear to have been lost or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and the diasporic process. Thus, many of the performed 'cham dances in exile are mainly based on reconstructions from the memory of aging dance masters from Tibet. It remains in their hands to reestablish the dances and correct the mostly young and generally inexperienced monk dancers.

Besides a general reduction of performance time, some 'cham schedules have been modified according to the audience's availability or to local tourist seasons.²⁶ It appears that the performances are no longer embedded in a wider ritual context on such occasions. In any case, with or without the ritual context, most ritual dance performances are community events, creating ethnic

²³ It is impossible to say whether they are actually monks or not. I would guess though that they are not monks.

²⁴ For a description of the ideological impact on Tibetan opera as it is performed today in Eastern Tibet, see Kvaerne (1994).

²⁵ For example, the current three day long ritual of *dGu-gtor* in Dolanji (*khro-phu dgu-gtor*) used to be traditionally performed for at least seven days at the end of each month for the purpose of expulsion of evil forces (interview with Ven. Sangye Tenzin Jongsong).

²⁶ However, most ritual masked dances performed in Tibetan exile communities and Tibetan Buddhist regions of the Himalayas are still staged according to the local calendars.

identities which, depending on the region, might be termed Ladakhi, Bhutanese, Sikkimese, Tibetan. Distinct forms of *Tibetanness* are thus constructed in the sociopolitical contexts of Tibetans as refugees in exile and as colonized people in Tibet. However, it must be pointed out that "*Tibetanness*" is perceived differently according to local conditions and the cultural politics of the participating groups. It is therefore a contested and pluralistic category of identity.²⁷

Nevertheless, *'cham* performances were already being modified along some of the lines noted above before 1959 in Tibet. Among others, Rakra Tethong observed that dancers in the 1950s danced considerably faster than they used to earlier. The same happened with the performance speed of monastic vocal music (*dbyang*) (Tethong 1979: 21). Reasons for such changes might be located partially in the beginnings of modernity's influence in Tibet at the time, as we have already seen with the example of a Bhutanese *'cham* explicitly staged for British officials in the 1930s. It would, however, be naive to think that the early influences of modernity alone could cause such changes. Traditions and the performance of ritual were not fixed in a static sense in the past, and still continue to change in the present. They are, rather, reinvented and shaped according to the cultural politics involved. The interesting factor here is that Tibetan monks themselves stress that their religious knowledge is handed down unchanged from master to pupil in uninterrupted lineages which are often recalled and venerated as part of the actual ritual. By linking it to its origin the ritual (and its performers) is legitimized, ensuring success.

The Gelugpa tradition was also famous for emphasizing the "correctness" of their ritual performances in the past. The Gelugpa tradition was so concerned about ritual accuracy that they even accused others of making "shows" out of ritual on occasion. This already happened, for example, in the 17th century in terms of a political strategy against their rivals. After the 5th Dalai Lama composed a *Phur-pa 'cham* (which was probably already based on a Sakyapa model) and inserted a ritual dance of the Nyingma tradition into it, an orthodox faction among the Gelugpas rejected the innovation by stating that Nyingmapa dances were purely shows created to "spin the heads of the people of the marketplace" (Ellingson 1979: 171). Nowadays this Tibetan religious school is the major performer of public Tantric ritual displays in the West, as we have seen, for example, with the "world tour" *'cham* performances by the exile Gelugpa monastery of Drepung Loseling.

Another controversy arises in contemporary Ladakh concerning the appropriateness of staging *'cham* outside the monastic context. Schedules for the performance of ritual dances had already been moved to the summer tourist season as early as 1985. In August/ September 1995, a *'cham* was performed for the first time during a secular folklore festival known as the Ladakh Festival. This one hour dance was held in the courtyard of the Leh Gonpa Soma, located in the main bazaar of the city. The Student's Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) reacted with a strong protest against this "profanization," asking other organizations to join the protest. The monastery's association and a tourist official tried to justify this case by stating that the selected dances were "less sacred" and had therefore been chosen carefully for the event. Such "neo-puritan" voices like those of SECMOL concerning "cultural correctness" are characteristic signs of an upsurge in recent displays of local nationalism among politicized Ladakhi Buddhists. Such modifications of space and time, or the selection of "less sacred" *'cham* performances (like the yak and lion dances), do not appear as problematic in the West as they do in Ladakh. However, monastic dancers from Tibetan exile communities staging *'cham* in the West are conscious of this problem, even though they might not be outspoken on the topic.

²⁷ However, most ritual masked dances performed in Tibetan exile communities and Tibetan Buddhist regions of the Himalayas are still staged according to the local calendars.

'*Cham* in the West is staged in order to raise funds for the monastery, propagate religious traditions, and to create an awareness of a Tibetan culture endangered by Chinese colonization and restrictions. While the ritual dance is performed traditionally for a variety of explicit purposes – the expulsion of evil forces, the procurement of blessings, empowerment or for the spiritual cultivation of those attending and participating – in the West the audience members sit in their chairs expecting a most "authentic" presentation of "sacred dance," merely watching the monks performing segments of complex movements stripped of their ritual context. The transformation which is said to happen during performance has to be imagined completely out of its original context and within the confines of a different worldview. Therefore the advertised effects of a "peaceful mind" or even of "world healing" seem rather to rest upon mystified Western representations of superior Tibetan spirituality.

Despite these different representations of and innovations in Tibetan ritual dances performed in a range of new cultural contexts and for different purposes, '*cham* traditions have continued to be actively revived in the last ten years. In exile, for example, the Schechen monastery in Kathmandu invited two dance masters from their tradition in Tibet to reestablish traditional ritual dances at their exile monastery in 1992. I have heard from visitors to Tibetan populated areas in contemporary China that since the early 1980s many '*cham* traditions were reestablished and are now attended by a significant number of Tibetans.²⁸ Also, '*cham* performances have been staged increasingly during the last ten years in the West. Tibetan lamas now even give classes to teach ritual dance or create new dances as a meditational practice for their Western followers.²⁹ This revitalization of Tibetan ritual dances shows on one hand their importance as a popular vehicle for religious culture inside Tibetan communities. It also suggests their significance for potential sponsors, guests and others. The need for some Tibetan monasteries in exile to objectify and display their "culture" in portable and spectacular forms for economic and political reasons in the West belongs to this category. On the other hand, it demonstrates an increasing demand in the West for a marketable and consumable version of "Tibetan culture" which is shaped by both sides, dialectically adapting to new contexts. Regarding the final performance version, however, it seems to be the case that Western organizers have the greater decision-making power.

The monks do not have an easy task. They have to legitimize their role as keepers of a religious culture and as ritual specialists inside their own communities, communities which often have a high rate of mobility but still support the clerics as much as possible. The monks in question are also well-aware that they must deal with a growing need for Western sponsors. Foreign supporters, of course, have their own particular interests and agendas, nurturing specific perceptions of Tibet. The Bon and Buddhist clergy are acutely aware of this, and have consciously incorporated '*cham* performances in the West as part of their ongoing process to cultivate awareness for the multifaceted cause that brought them to the Occident in the first place. Will it ultimately lead from village lama to global healer?

²⁸ Dongfan confirms this in his article and speaks of "tens of thousands of followers and pilgrims" and "hundreds of monks" in the context of a '*cham* performance at Tashilhunpo (1993: 22, 26). See also Mackley (1994: 74) who states "In China today, Tibetans participate in the "tourist gaze"..., and eagerly consume "Tibetanness" objectified in educational videos, dances, and music."

²⁹ See, for example, Norbu (1992).

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