

DRANYEN: A STUDY IN TIBETAN IDENTITY

Tashi Tenzin*

INTRODUCTION

Dranyen, an instrument with six strings in three groups, is the basis and foundation of Tibetan traditional music. For a thousand years it has existed predominantly in Tibet and is believed to have been exclusively created on the plateau. There have been many research works published on Tibetan art, literature, culture and religion in and outside Tibet, but the articles on dranyen, its origin, features, shape and the type of rhythms played were rarely explicit and largely superficial. However, in-depth research, particularly on its origin and existing challenges, is rarely accessible.

This study, though with limited sources, focuses on historical background, the use of notations, and the expansion of its use and challenges in facing threats from external factors. I have pointed out here possible links which could guide the readers or dranyen-lovers to know how the instrument was invented or introduced in Tibet. My hope is that this will also benefit the fledgling Tibetan artists, and future generations who intend to learn dranyen, in understanding the spread of use of dranyen in various regions and the development of regional rhythms and styles of playing.

In addition, this paper also discusses the birth of the Tibetan traditional music genre, Nangma-Toeshey, and how it became acclaimed as one of the crucial elements in Tibetan identity. Apart from this unique Tibetan traditional genre, the study also partly highlights other music such as folk songs and street songs of the mid-20th century. The study also examines the impediments to, and the advancement of, dranyen during critical stages of the late 20th century and also the corresponding rise of artists in and outside Tibet. The conclusion is that, while the instrument was invented in Tibet, it may have been inspired or derived from elsewhere.

DEFINITION

The two-syllable word comprising *dra* and *nyen* refers to tune and melody respectively and can be defined as the instrument of melodious tune or sound. It is also called *tambhura* in Sanskrit. During the initial stages of its emergence, it was popularly known as the string instrument or six-stringed instrument because of its composition. In the western region of Tibet it was known as *goepo* and in the late medieval era, around the 17th century, the instrument popularly came to be known as *Ngari*¹ *dranyen* due to its origin from *Ngari* region. Travellers from the West regarded this as the most essential instrument of the Tibetan plateau. Under the Tibetan musical instrument classification it falls within the family of percussion, while according to Western music it falls under the string family.

THE ORIGINS

The origin of *dranyen* provably dates back a millennium to the 7th century. However, there are various contrary historical backgrounds propounded by Tibetan musicians and historians. In point of fact, most of the sources for the origins of *dranyen* relied on oral traditions which remain perplexing. The reason is that there are no written accounts of its origins that could provide a reliable source to rewrite and define its origin. But the most talked about and commonly heard opinions about *dranyen* come from Tibetan aristocrats who were music enthusiasts and members of *Lhasa's Nangma*² Association, and those from researchers who emerged in Tibet during the mid and late 20th century.

Dranyen was believed by some to have been adapted from the *sarod*³ (in turn a descendant of the *Afghan Rubab*⁴ originating from Central Asia and Afghanistan) played by *Khaches*,⁵ the Muslim community residing in Kashmir. The exact date of its development is lost in the history of medieval Tibet, yet many believe that the *dranyen's* use spread in the 7th century during the reign of *Songtsen Gampo*. As evidence, it can be seen in murals on the walls of the 8th century *Samye*

¹ The western region of Tibet.

² A Tibetan traditional and classical music genre.

³ An Indian stringed instrument used mainly in classical music from medieval times.

⁴ Instrument originating from central Afghanistan dating from the 7th Century AD.

⁵ Tibetan word for Muslims.

Monastery, Rasa Trulnang temple⁶, and the 1,300-year-old, Potala Palace⁷ in the capital, which depicts the king being entertained by court minstrels playing dranyen. It was also said that when Songtsen Gampo prescribed The 10 Divine Principles or Virtues and The 16 Human Principles of Moral Conduct as a decree, the entertainment at the event by local minstrels was accompanied by *dranyen*⁸. This decree is said to have been promulgated after the invention of the Tibetan written script by Thonmi Sambhota⁹ in the year 646 AD. (*Illustration 1. Indian Sarod. Illustration 2. Afghan Rubab.*)

According to the book *Choetrin Ghar-rol*, published in January 1985 in Tibet, songs and dances became widespread in Tibet during the reign of the 11th King, Dhesho Leg, around the 1st century AD. But the arrival of instruments and music as a whole broadly expanded during the reign of King Songtsen Gampo. It is recorded that in the years 634 and 641 AD, this king brought to Tibet two princess as his queens from Nepal and China respectively. One objective behind these marriages of alliance was to bring the statue of Jowo Mikyoe Dorje¹⁰ from Nepal, (said to have been consecrated by Lord Buddha and Ananda¹¹) and Jowo Shakyamuni¹² from China (blessed by the hands of Lord Buddha himself) to Tibet. During the receptions for both the brides, the king and his ministers, along with their attendants, were entertained by the populace with extensive cultural performances and elaborate royal celebrations which featured dranyen as one of the musical instruments. (Separate temples were constructed for each of the statues.)¹³

In the year 653 AD, after the successful construction of the Rasa Trulnang temple, people rejoiced and celebrated the occasion with public entertainments. These included racing on foot, horse racing, stone lifting and particularly cultural performances accompanied by both sacred and secular instruments. So, the origin of dranyen can be almost certainly dated from the 7th century according to the above historical records and murals.

⁶ Lhasa's cathedral presently known as the Jokhang.

⁷ Lhasa's iconic monument, first constructed by King Songtsen Gampo and later renovated and extended by the Vth Dalai Lama. Awarded World Heritage listing by UNESCO in 1994.

⁸ Quoted from an article authored by Paldon, music teacher in Tibet University, TAR.

⁹ A minister of Songtsen Gampo who designed the Tibetan script.

¹⁰ A statue of Lord Buddha at 8 years old.

¹¹ A disciple of Lord Buddha.

¹² A statue of Lord Buddha at 12 years old.

¹³ Rasa Trulnang temple for the Lord Buddha's statue at eight and Ramoche temple for the Lord Buddha's statue at 12.

Ian Collinge, an ethno-musicologist, in his research findings cites various possibilities for dranyen's origins. He suggests that it could possibly have been derived from short-necked lutes found in Central Asia (including the regions of Peshawar in Pakistan and the Jalalabad district of Afghanistan, then Indian territories) during the 1st century AD. Apart from the short-necked lutes, the other instruments closely resembling it include the Tajiks' Kashgar Rubab and the Uyghurs' Pamir Robab. He discusses in his findings that the horse-head finial of the instrument refers to the horse culture existing during medieval times throughout Eurasia, from the Balkans to Tibet and Mongolia. According to him, the first historical records of the instrument (then popularly known as the Pi-wang) were described in an 8th century document stating that it was used for royal celebrations during the reign of King Songtsen Gampo, 617-649 AD. (*Illustration 3. Tajik's Kashgar Rubab. Illustration 4. Uyghur's Pamir Robab*)

Some other related sources, with vague explanations, suggest that this instrument was produced and adapted in Southern Tibet's sub-tropical Kongpo region because of the availability of wood from its thick and dense forests. This region was famous for its ancient forests until Chinese invaders felled Kongpo's dense forest, destroying its geographic identity during the 1960s.

Other sources suggest that dranyen originated from Goddess Saraswati¹⁴ (Lhamo Yangchenma) who is revered in the sub-continent as the goddess of knowledge and art, pervasively worshipped in India, Nepal, Tibet and other Asian countries. Legend has it that her love and fondness for art and poetry have won her many devotees, spreading the fame and popularity of the instrument to Tibet. Saraswati is occasionally worshipped by Tibetans who depict her with a Tambhura¹⁵ spread on her lap. The notation used for this instrument is believed to have been devised during the 2nd century AD by Sage Bharath and Master Chandra Gomi. Translation of these notations from Sanskrit to Tibetan was undertaken during the reign of King Trisong Deutsen in the 8th century. The same translated seven tones or notes are still being actively used both in and outside Tibet, but in the European Sol-Fa¹⁶ method. A Tibetan version of notations did appear in Tibet before the usage of today's notation (Sol-Fa and numbered notation). This Tibetan notation was

¹⁴ The Hindu muse or goddess of art, knowledge, learning, music and wisdom.

¹⁵ An Indian classical stringed instrument.

¹⁶ A pedagogical technique for teaching sight singing.

used while performing the Gharlu¹⁷ compositions during the time of the Great 5th Dalai Lama in the 17th century. These consisted of more than 14 notes. Based on this evidence, a firm conclusion can easily be drawn that the instrument was a creation of Tibetans and it was invented exclusively in Tibet, contrary to the origins and influences suggested by various sources.

(Illustration 5. Indian muse Saraswati with a Tambhura on her lap.)

THE FLOURISHING OF DRANYEN

The instrument established its popularity in the Ngari region and became widespread throughout Central Tibet, and in Amdo and Kham in North-eastern and eastern Tibet. The design and the features like the number of strings and tuning of the instrument kept changing from one region to another. In its early stages, the shape and design of the instrument closely resembled the sarod with a carved horse's head as the finial. Alternatively, in north-eastern Tibet's Amdo region, people used to carve a dragon's head which is referred to as Drug-go (the dragon-head instrument). As the instrument moved further afield across Ladakh (particularly the deserts of Jhangthang in the later half of the 20th century), Sikkim and Bhutan, variations of designs and features were added from one region to another.

Owing to the melodious tone it produces depending on the wood, leather, strings used in its assembly, and styles of fingering, the name for the instrument was officially given as dranyen during the rule of Tsang Desi Zhingshak Tseten Dorjee and his sons¹⁸ in Central Tibet from 1565-1640 AD. Prior to this, the instrument had various names according to its features and designs. The shape of the instrument, the body, neck and the headstock kept on changing with time.

A high point in the popularity of dranyen was when the 5th Dalai Lama established Bho-shung Gaden Phodrang¹⁹ to assume overall rule of Tibet in the year 1642. Many minstrels from all regions of the country had the opportunity to perform before the Great 5th Dalai Lama and the Tibetan public during his enthronement and assumption of absolute spiritual and political

¹⁷ Genre of music especially performed for the Dalai Lamas. Said to be 74 compositions.

¹⁸ Zhignshak Tseten Dorjee rose from tax collector to Tsang ruler by overthrowing the Rinpungpas. After the downfall of the Sakyas, Central Tibet remained under the rule of Phakmo Drupas, Rinpungpas and Tsangpas from 1350-1640 AD.

¹⁹ Government house in Lhasa, official title of the Tibetan government.

authority. The Great 5th, as he became known, ameliorated the social system, brought law and order, and stressed on the importance of religion, culture, art and literature.

Under the guidelines and supervision of Regent Desi Sangye Gyatso, the government invited Tashi, son of Master Gutu, one of the finest musician of that era, to move to Lhasa to adapt and establish the root text of the musical instrument. It was during that era that the Nangma-Toeshey songs were composed for the first time as described in a book written by Desi Sangye Gyatso. This gave birth to what is popularly known today as Nangma-Toeshey²⁰, the sole nomenclature of Tibetan music.

When Doring²¹ Tenzin Paljor emerged as a fine musician in Tibet in the late 18th century, he introduced jamming with various musical instruments by bringing the dulcimer and erhu²² from China to accompany dranyen. Since that experimental era, many musical forms have been invented and was re-fashioned as folk music, classical and traditional music, regional music and music suitable for occasions. Dranyen was an instrument of entertainment for all strata of society, from aristocrats and court officials to commoners, farmers and wandering musicians. Prior to this dranyen was the sole instrument for musical entertainment.

Folk music and songs from earlier times were primarily in praise of the kings, scholars and, religious leaders for their contribution towards the spread of Buddhism, and eulogizing the beauty of the Tibetan plateau, its culture and religion. Other folk songs were linked to the tasks of people while farming, herding and engaged in other routine domestic events.

Along with traditional and folk music, a musical genre as a form of street songs spread in Lhasa during the early 20th century. These songs were regarded as political satire or public commentary to voice the Tibetan society's criticism for the misdeeds of mighty political figures. But these compositions later turned into patriotism and a medium for the man-in-the-street to voice his opposition to invaders. It is unknown whether this genre was accompanied by dranyen or not. Professor Melvyn C. Goldstein, in his research paper, describes how these street songs were sung and used during the invasion and occupation of Tibet by the British Raj in 1904 and Manchu China

²⁰ The classical and traditional music genre.

²¹ A landmark adjoined to names of nearby residents.

²² A two stringed fiddle-bow instrument from mainland China.

in 1910. A song was written when the British marched into Tibet and occupied Lhasa. The translation of this verse by Melvyn Goldstein reads,

At first they were known as the enemies of faith;
And then they were known as "foreigners."
But when (we) saw their English dollars,
We called them Honourable Sahib²³.

This song was in criticism of the traitors who fell prey to the profits the British brought to Lhasa. The enemies of faith easily turned into honourable gentlemen. Similarly, when the Chinese invaded and occupied Tibet in 1910 to 1912, a song was written about the two largest monasteries in Tibet, Drepung and Sera. It was a comment for the two monasteries different responses to the invasion. The translated verse read,

Drepung, (is like) a nun's gruel,
Even though you boil it, it won't boil.
Sera, (is like) a beggar's soup,
It spills over before it boils.

It was said that the monks of Drepung Monastery responded to the Chinese invaders very sympathetically, whereas the monks from Sera Monastery attacked the Chinese encampment at Drapchi²⁴ without any organized strategy, resulting in heavy losses. In 1950, when Mao's troops invaded Tibet to "liberate the serfs", the songs and posters voiced the anger and resistance of Lhasa's suffering population. A song sarcastically comments on Chinese liberation of serfs reads:

The liberation army has arrived.
The herd of beggars has arrived.
Everyone has been liberated.
Everyone has been made beggars.

These songs and posters were the only medium open to the mainly illiterate citizens of the streets.

²³ A polite Hindi title to address a gentleman.

²⁴ A region of Lhasa now housing Tibet's largest prison.

NOTATION USED FOR DRANYEN

Over a long spell of time, Tibet saw a variety of notations. It is believed that the notation for the monastic/ritual instruments (including horns, cymbals, conches etc.) was invented much earlier than for the lay instruments. Each of the four Buddhist sects, as well as Bon, (the indigenous Shamanist tradition dating to around 6th century BC), had introduced its own characteristic notations for ritual purposes. Along with the flowering and spread of Buddhism across Tibet through the different sects, traditional ritual music also steadily expanded.

Similarly, the earliest notation used for the dranyen was also distinctive and based particularly on the scale and volume of tunes. These notations include *Phothong*, *Mothong*, *Bhartong*, etc, consisting of 15 notes. This kind of notation prevailed till the 8th century but it was soon replaced by the Tibetan notation translated and adapted from Indian sargam²⁵, equivalent to the European Sol-Fa. The Great Dungkar Dictionary describes these seven notes as *Druk-kye* (Cry of the peacock), *Drang-song* (Lowing of the bull), *Sa-zin* (Bleating of a goat), *Bhar-ma* (Call of the heron/crane), *Nga-dhen* (Call of the cuckoo), *Los-sel* (Neighing of the horse) and *Khor-nyen* (Trumpeting of the elephant). This Tibetan notation did spread to a large extent, but at the same time the characterized notation survived till the late 18th century.

Doring Tenzin Paljor, a musician, is said to have studied music in China and after completing three years of studies he introduced the Chinese Phuzi notation system to Tibet in 1793 along with the Erhu and Dulcimer. The Chinese Phuzi notation was mainly used for performing the traditional music genre, Nangma-Toeshey. Use of this Phuzi notation continued till the early 1980s both inside and outside Tibet. But this was again replaced by numbered notation (Cheve method²⁶). The Cheve method, Sol-Fa system notation, was read in letters but written in numbers, which is also regarded as Asian Numbered Notation by Westerners. Although these notations have different titles, owing to the origins from various countries, they are the same tones and scales apart from the ancient Tibetan characterized notations. See the table of different notations below.

²⁵ Indian classical notation for musical composition.

²⁶ A system of associating each note of a scale with a particular syllable, originally created in France.

Notation and Solmization system							
<i>Number</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Sol-Fa</i>	Do	Re	Mi	Fa	So	La	Si/Thi
<i>Sargam</i>	Sa	Re	Ga	Ma	Pa	Dha	Ni
<i>Phu-zi</i>	Rhang	Tre	Kung	Phen	Li'u	U'u	Yee
<i>Tibetan</i>	Drug-kye	Drang-song	Sazin	Bharma	Nga-dhen	Losel	Khorneyen

THE USE OF DRANYEN IN DIFFERENT MUSIC GENRES

Dranyen was used in Gharlu music before the introduction of Nangma-Toeshey in Tibet. As Gharlu was exclusively composed for the Dalai Lamas, it was primarily heard at banquets of aristocrats and the Lhasa nobility. This genre, though regarded as traditional music, differs from the four six-syllable verses like Nangma-Toeshey. The length and the content of the songs also varies from classical music.

Nangma-Toeshey is a traditional and long-established form of musical genre that rose in popularity during the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama. In style it mainly consists of verses with four six-syllable lines, long phrases, and filled with syllables like 'la ni', 'so ni', 'ya la' etc. To talk about Nangma, this traditional form of music has various histories of how it was introduced in Tibet. Nangma literally means internal or inside matter. In other contexts, according to the musicians, it means a form of music invented within the region and locality. Other sources explain that the title was derived from the Balti (Urdu) word *Naghma*,²⁷ changing its phoneme to Nangma in Tibetan, because of the close links and association of Tibetan musicians with the people of Kashmir.

The origin of Nangma is also linked with a quintessential 7th century text, written by Master Chandra Gomi, which describes it as Zhangzhung Manangma, the 11th of 35 different types of songs. The definition of Nangma in Tibetan encyclopaedia, *Dungkar Tsikzoe Chenmo*²⁸, is reflected as a form of ancient folk music that evolved into a foundational base of entertainment in Tibet during the reign of the Great 5th Dalai Lama. The background to its verbal convention is

²⁷ Urdu word for tune or music.

²⁸ Tibetan Dictionary with detailed definitions.

still debatable; irrespective of its origins, people during the 17th century laid stress on forming musical associations and so Nangma came to be one of the indispensable forms of music. It has three components; introductory music, singing the lyrics in arias and performing quick-steps at the end. The lyrics of the songs are much embellished and carry significant messages such as prophecies of reincarnations. For instance, when the 6th Dalai Lama was enthroned in the year 1679, one of the musical associations composed a song whose lyrics are still famous both inside and outside Tibet today. It reads:

"In the garden of Tashi²⁹,
A blessed flower came into being
Seasonal daylight rain poured down,
Just before morning dew drops vanished".

And the 6th Dalai Lama predicted his own reincarnation in words implying the location in this poem which remains very popular among all Tibetans.

"White crane!
Lend me your wings,
I will not fly far,
From Lithang³⁰, I shall return³¹".

The genre called Toeshey also has a variety of backgrounds. It is believed that this version of music emerged from Toe³² region as suggested by its title. Songs and the style of music composed and popularized in the region became identified as Toeshey. The other discernible history of Toeshey is that, before the introduction of dranyen in Tibet, people of the region used to perform circle-dances as a local custom and they were performed during most social occasions such as the events held after harvesting and the gathering of crops, public get-togethers, parties, wedding ceremonies and official events. So, when the instrument started spreading in popularity

²⁹ Ngag-chag Rinzin Tashi Tenzin, father of the VIth Dalai Lama.

³⁰ A region in Kham province, Eastern Tibet.

³¹ Quoted from K. Dhondup's Songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama.

³² A western region in Tibet.

from Ngari in the west towards the eastern extremities of Tibet, people in Toe region adopted dranyen to add melody to their circle-dances. It is also believed that this pattern of music is an adaptation to those circle-dances and their performances continue to the present day.

Nangma and Toeshey are very much alike, but the only factor differing one from the other is the tempo of the songs. The former is played in leisurely style, while the latter carries a slightly brisker pace. Though these two genres are defined by their titles, yet they are hyphenated and referred to as the classical and traditional form of music, Nangma-Toeshey. In abbreviated form this is sometimes referred to as Nang-Toe. This form of music continued to characterize Tibet until the era of the 13th Dalai Lama witnessed the rise of a musical icon. Acho³³ Namgyal was tragically blinded in infancy, yet he grew up to rejuvenate Tibet's musical landscape by introducing fresh compositions and exceptional fusions of sound. He taught music and dranyen to many budding artists and gave wings of skill and talent to one of his students, Sonam Topgyal, who owned a tailoring factory in Lhasa. As a gesture and token of his love, Acho composed and dedicated a classical song in his student's name; this was also to express the close bond and relationship between himself and his student. It was during Acho Namgyal's time that Tibetan traditional and classical music reached to new heights of inspiration.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Tibet witnessed a number of music celebrities such as Abdul Rehman (Abdu Rama, a Tibetan Muslim), Bai Wali (a Muslim), Gordrung Sonam, Kadrung Marlampa, Norgye Nangpa, Sonam Kyizom, Phurbu Dolma and many more.

Until the People's Republic of China invaded and occupied Tibet in the 1950s, Tibetan music and opera had remained unchanged and unaffected since the time of their emergence. But after 1950, under Mao's dictatorship, the land of peaceful pursuits was converted into a war zone: more than one million Tibetans were killed and thousands of monasteries destroyed. Operas and songs became the vehicles for Communist propaganda. Entertainment was reduced to reading Mao's Little Red Book and the upper strata of society was taunted and tortured at *thamzing* or public struggle sessions.

³³ Elder brother in Tibetan.

MUSIC IN TIBET AFTER 1959

The music that had characterized Tibet started losing its audience after 1959. All traditional genres were banned during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. But some became restricted or censored under socialism far earlier. The Chinese authorities in Tibet restricted, and continue to restrict, traditional and religious activities. Tibetan music and opera were used to praise Mao, impose socialist reforms and enforce communist rule across the plateau. Tibetan music before this served as a source and mode of generating income for wandering musicians, but the musical earnings grew at a higher pace when China introduced Pop music in Tibet. Tibetans in entertainment troupes were sent to China to get trained in western music, singing with musical accompaniment (a lot of Tibetan singing is unaccompanied) and the troupes (employing around 18,350 performers till 2008³⁴) were provided stable employment and reasonable salaries.

This cultural blurring not only gave rise to Pop music in Tibet, in addition the Chinese authorities introduced karaoke, discotheques and nightclubs in major cities and towns. The famous stand-up comedians of the 20th century in Tibet, Thubten la and Migmar la, opened Nangma bars in Lhasa in the 1980s but these were closed down in 1987 following a mass demonstration in Lhasa against Chinese rule. Nangma bars were resurrected in the late 1990s and by 2000 the number operating in the capital was significant. These were initially established as places to perform traditional Tibetan music and dances seemingly as a form of cultural resistance to Chinese Pop music, but later karaoke and disco bars began to infiltrate Nangma bars too.

There was a time when both the famous stand-up comedians feared that the dranyen was on the verge of becoming extinct and ran a high risk of deterioration. The authorities relentlessly cracked down on patriotic songs, songs of resistance, songs of protest, political songs, songs in praise of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and lyrics advocating freedom and independence. Those who performed such songs would be imprisoned or face heavy fines. This drove musicians and singers to stick to singing songs in praise of mother, nature and create street songs.

However, even while the presence of hardliners ensured unchanging policies on Tibet, and the continuing oppression of Tibetans, a new musical celebrity called Palden Gonpo, (popularly known

³⁴ Figure shown in para 23 of Beijing's 2008 White Paper on Tibet: Protection and Development of Tibetan Culture.

as Palgon) emerged on the scene. Born 1949 in Machu in Amdo, in North-eastern Tibet, and a doctor by profession, it was his passion for music which led him to probably becoming the most famous Amdowa to learn dranyen. The instrument became a comprehensive addition to Amdo music. He also introduced the mandolin to Amdo performers. It is said that he was taught dranyen by the famous scholar of Tibetan Buddhism's Gelug lineage, Gungthang Tenpe Wangchuk Rinpoche³⁵, an abbot of Labrang Tashi Khyil³⁶ Monastery in today's Gansu Province. Known for his unflinching effort in striving hard to preserve Tibetan art and literature, Gungthang Rinpoche was sentenced to 21 years of imprisonment in 1958 on charges of plotting and leading protests against the Chinese rule.

Palgon catapulted into stardom and earned critical acclaim in and outside Tibet when he composed the song Akhu³⁷ Pema³⁸, a composition accompanied by dranyen which remained very popular in and outside Tibet for many decades after its release. It is said that he appeared in Qinghai Tibetan Broadcasting station in 1979 to perform songs which had been composed by himself and Gungthang Rinpoche. He was also the first artist to have his songs recorded and produced as cassettes and VCDs. Though the song Akhu Pema certainly doesn't carry any explicit political message, many people interpreted it as an address to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and thus it became politicized in Tibet. The song was reportedly banned from being played and performed in Nangma bars for several years and a singer is said to have been imprisoned for singing it in public. Now no longer restricted, many different versions have been produced by artists in and outside Tibet as remakes and with distinctive improvisations. A stanza from the song could be translated as:

Uncle Pema³⁹,
Oh mighty Eagle adorned with a conch-white stripe!
If you soar heavenwards, you adorn the azure sky,
If you descend earthwards, you gladden the craggy mountains,
And your absence makes the craggy ledges bereft of any life!

³⁵ A title given to high lamas. Literally meaning precious substance.

³⁶ In traditional Dhomey (Amdo) province.

³⁷ A title given to monks in Amdo.

³⁸ The lotus flower.

³⁹ An oblique reference to His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

It was after the launch of this hit song that dranyen became a major trend in Amdo. It is believed that Gungthang Rinpoche inspired many youngsters to learn dranyen and he even bought an instrument for a youth and sent him to Palgon for lessons. Since then Palgon has trained many emerging singers as skilled dranyen players, such as Dhubey, Dhorey, Yundrung Kyab, Gonpo Dhondrup, and the likes of Sonam Gonpo. Dhubey, dubbed as the Blue Cuckoo, became one of the new generation's most famous singers from Amdo. He was also known for his mastery of dranyen, singing and playing the mandolin as well. The era saw the emergence of many new Pop artists such as Dadon, Yadong, Sonam Wangmo, Dolma, and Tenpa.

TIBETAN MUSIC OUTSIDE TIBET AFTER 1959

After fleeing Tibet into India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama stressed on the need for a drama school and with the consent of the Kashag⁴⁰ in Mussoorie, one of the oldest institutions in exile was established on 11 August 1959 in Kalimpong, West Bengal. The institution later came to be known as the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, commonly known as TIPA, (better known to the Tibetan exile community as Conium/Kolum Doegar⁴¹) when it shifted its base from Kalimpong to Dharamsala in 1961. Since then, the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts has been at the core of exile life in Dharamsala, and continues to be under the patronage of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

Established primarily with the objective of preserving Tibetan culture, and to promote the Tibetan issue on the international stage, from this early time the institution has unfailingly produced generations of Tibetan performing artists. To this day it continues to train the youth in mastering Tibetan opera (Ache Lhamo), traditional Tibetan songs, folk dances, excel in playing traditional instruments and thereby keeping the unique Tibetan performing arts alive.

Some of the finest artists who graduated from the institution are Sonam Tashi (Acho Danny), Gonpo Dorjee and Shazur Tashi Dhondup (Techung), all of whom trained under one of the prominent members of the Nangma Association in pre-1950s Lhasa, the late master Lutsa. A renowned proponent of Tibetan classical music, master Lutsa was born in Lhasa in 1915, and

⁴⁰ The Cabinet of the Central Tibetan Administration, then the Tibetan Exile Government.

⁴¹ A cottage earlier owned by an Englishman by the name of Conium.

learned dranyen from early childhood. He started his musical journey when he was 18. It was through his favourite instrument, the dranyen, that he earned his fame in Lhasa. After fleeing Tibet in 1960 he was appointed as one of the teachers at TIPA and was an inspiration for his students until he passed away at 68 in the year 1983. The late master Lutsa, during his time at the institution, inculcated the age-old traditional way of reading, writing and studying the notations for the artists and musicians, and trained them in the repertoires of Nangma-Toeshey along with folk music. He taught his students the Phu-zi music notations for the instruments, especially for dranyen, but this was later replaced by the Sol-Fa notations, now regarded by major dranyen players as the strong base of Tibetan classical music.

Jamyang Choeden (Jack), a self-taught dranyen player, received guidelines and instructions from master Sonam Tsering, while Tenzin Norbu (Tenor) and Norbu Samphel (Ali), trained under master Gonpo Dorjee. They are now some of the 21st century's leading performers from the institution, known for their flawless skills in dranyen.

Shazur Tashi Dhondup (Jhola⁴² Techung), an exceptional product of the Institute, is widely renowned in the Tibetan diaspora for his folk and opera singing, and his ever-extending musical journey of creation through volumes of albums. The esteem amongst the top-most artists in the exile community for him comes from his expertise in vocal and musical skills. His albums consist of songs in praise of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, festive songs, drinking songs and classical songs. One of his compositions that drew wide attention and attracted a multitude of fans, and became a trend, was in praise of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. One verse of the song is below:

In the Land of Snows there dwells a lion
A Snow Lion found in no other land
His Holiness is the peaceful Snow Lion
And his heart, symbolizes love and compassion.

The Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts has trained more than 360 artists and 150 fully-fledged music teachers up to today. These teachers are now responsible for preserving Tibet's rich legacy of performing arts and culture through Tibetan schools in India, Nepal and abroad. Apart from

⁴² A title for a gentleman in Tibetan.

these, other talented artists also emerged in exile such as Tawo Lobsang Palden, Tsering Gyurmey, and Phurbu T. Namgyal. Tawo Lobsang Palden is popularly known for his traditional folk songs whereas the latter two performers are known as Pop singers: what they share in common is the inclusion of classical dranyen in their music.

Phurbu T. Namgyal, a public figure in the Tibetan community across India and in overseas, caught the attention of many younger generation Tibetans living abroad by his initiatives in teaching dranyen on his website, on YouTube, and via various social media sites. He is devoted to these initiatives which many believe will make the difference in preserving Tibetan performing arts and culture. Whether through the alumni of TIPA, or all the other performers on screen or on stage, the volume of Tibetan music reverberating around the world will ensure that the melodious dranyen will always find an audience.

CONCLUSION

The musicians in Tibet during the 19th and early 20th centuries might have never felt the necessity of documenting the dranyen's origins, historical backgrounds and how it became widespread in Tibet. The country's fate in the years to come could not have been foreseen. But with Communist China's invasion and occupation of Tibet, and the cultural genocide that resulted, Tibetan art, culture, language, religion, and identity faced jeopardy and a great risk of extinction.

For many years after their escape from Tibet, India's Tibetan community remained isolated and immune from the outside world. As the first generation forced into exile, while suffering the tragic loss of their homeland, their Tibetan-ness in terms of art, culture, and identity remained stable during the initial decade. But with the passage of time, changes took place gradually amongst the majority of the exile community.

During the late 1980s and the early '90s, Pop and Jazz music captured the attention of Tibetan musicians and the community in general. Though Tibetan Pop music flourished in parallel to these global genres, the whole world witnessed their emergence and they became an unstoppable

influence in many different communities, both Western and Eastern. Bollywood⁴³ music, on the other hand, became hugely influential among the Tibetan communities scattered across India and its influence is still dominant today. All this has affected the course of traditional Tibetan music in many ways. As traditional music and songs were rarely being played during this transitional stage, the taste and interest in heavy, thumping electronic music grew to such an extent that the aria-style soulful and melodic sounds of old Tibetan music lost its charm.

The Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts meanwhile remained unperturbed. By carrying on its mission of preserving Tibetan arts in these challenging times, its efforts paid off when the institution revitalized the ancient traditional Tibetan classical music, Nangma-Toeshey. TIPA published its first-ever song book with lyrics and notations of Nangma-Toeshey, as well as the courtly Gharlu songs, in 1993. The result was that many amongst the younger generation were drawn to learning dranyen and then eventually performing traditional music.

Beijing takes an antagonistic attitude to Tibet's cultural preservation. In a White Paper released on 25 September 2008, the People's Republic of China targeted the promotion and protection of Tibet's traditions and culture. To undermine the ancient traditional Tibetan forms of music, the original purity is merged and tampered with by introducing Chinese vocal styles. This is very visible on Tibet Television (XZTV).⁴⁴ Along with this destruction of traditional Tibetan musical forms, the authorities introduced fusion costume designs to create a visual similarity between Tibetans and Chinese to reinforce the official claim that Tibet is, and always has been, a part of China. During the annual Tibetan New Year celebrations the state broadcasting department of the so called Tibet Autonomous Region telecasts Tibetan extravaganzas on Tibet TV. The glitzy fusion costumes and Chinese-style music and singing is an exercise in propaganda. While dranyen itself does not face any similar direct threats by cultural stylistic adaptation, yet it is also in danger of losing its identity. As the inherited knowledge in the ancient Tibetan way of teaching of dranyen from one generation to the next is diluted, a risk of it also being appropriated by a dominant culture remains very real.

⁴³ A label for India's Hindi film industry.

⁴⁴ An official TV Channel of Tibet Autonomous Region

Whether before or after 1959, conditions for the preservation of Tibet's rich culture, especially traditional music, have not been conducive. One reason was the opportunities given to emerging artists by musical events and stage performances during the late 1980s and early '90s. Economic conditions were poor in comparison with other communities, so Tibet lagged far behind and technical facilities for archiving traditional music were also unavailable. The rise of Pop music as an influence both in and outside Tibet also created major obstacles in preserving ancient traditional music.

In view of these factors, Tibetan musicologists and experts strongly advise that Tibet's traditional culture should be maintained intact and free from external influences and modern genres. While contemporary Tibetan music may have its own importance, and modern technology has improved the quality of the sound, at the same time it is vital to maintain and preserve the centuries-old ancient traditional music which validates the unique identity of our once-independent nation.

The dranyen itself symbolizes much of our cultural uniqueness. There is the quality of the strings, the shape of the tuning peg inspired by the phurba, Tibet's ritual dagger, and the rare style of strumming: Working of the leather on the bout or pot, designing of the neck and fingerboard may have first been inspired by lutes around Central Asia, but they resemble no other instrument today. Whether it was derived from sarod, tambhura, Kashgar rubab or Pamir robab in ancient times, today's instrument was creatively developed in Tibet itself and is now treasured as an emblem of Tibetan culture.



Illustration 1. Indian Sarod



Illustration 2. Afghan Rubab



Illustration 3. Tajik's Kashgar Rubab Illustration 4. Uyghur's Pamir Robab



Illustration 5. Indian Goddess Saraswati with a Tambhura on her lap.

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*Tashi Tenzin is an administrative staff member of the Tibet Policy Institute, Central Tibetan Administration. He was awarded a Diploma in musical training at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, Dharamsala.