

Selective Reconstruction of Ethnic Tourism and Cultural Heritage

---A Case Study of A Folk Culture in Tibet

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Abstract: This paper, being a case study of a peasant-run spare time Tibetan opera troupe, aims to show how national culture is utilized as a kind of resource and tool, and how it is decorated, showcased and consumed as capital in the market. The author concludes that traditional culture in tourism areas, in this case the Tibetan traditional culture, is shaped jointly by the need of tourists and the accommodating creations of the local cultural elites.

Nyanze is located in a urban and rural Combining Zone, northern suburb of Lhasa, Tibet, and it is nine miles away from the downtown of Lhasa. Situated in the dale basin near the lower reaches of Lhsha River, Nyanze has a height of 3900 meters. Before 2002, Nyanze had jurisdictions over seven villagers committees. They were Jisu, Renqinlai, Linka, Baru, Geru, Jiaerxi, and Baerku, in which six of them were agricultural villages while one was a semi-agricultural and semi-grazed village (the seventh, Geru Village). Till the end of 2002, Nyanze has 533 households with a total population of 2122.

Before the democratic reform is carried in Tibet, Nyanze is the Fazenda for fanes and

the former Tibet Local Government. Within its border, there are famous monasteries Sera Monastery which is among the four biggest monastery of Gulug, Tibetan Buddhism and its subordinate monasteries Kabengka, Sangqiu Monastery, Geri Monastery and so on.

Nyanze folk art troupe was established in August, 1979, after the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC¹ Central Committee. At that time, the whole country was under a full-scale construction. People were trying hard to restore variety of traditional cultural activities which were forbidden during the Cultural Revolution. Being supported by the commune, 18 peasants of Nyanze spontaneously organized and performed a-ce-lha-mo(Tibetan opera) in order to invigorate the leisure life of peasants. Nyanze has no tradition to perform a-ce-lha-mo in its common custom social history. However, every summer in July according Tibetan Calendar, the Lamas of Sera Monastery would play religious a-ce-lha-mo in the fane without worldly or utilitarian purposes. It was a non-economic religious activity. At the early stage of the Tibetan opera team, its members had not learnt to act; they were just familiar with the plots and various characters in the Tibetan opera. Taking account of encouragement and support the newborn thing, the Communal Reform Committee of the time employed an skillful old performing artist of a Tibetan opera in Lhasa to impart performing techniques on himself to the team members. On the Fruit Watch Festival² of the following year, the Tibetan opera team members appeared on the stage for the first time. They performed some traditional Tibetan operas, for example, snang-sa-vod-vbum. However, after that the Tibetan opera team's activities stopped and it was silent for a period because it lacked an outlay for sustaining normal team work. In addition, the enthusiasms of the team members diminished cold down since the performances delayed the farm works and took up their rest time without pays. It was not until 1991, when the present leader Gelong took over the Tibetan opera team, that this team can continue to perform and get a favorable turn.

¹ Communist Party of China

² A festival held by the peasant of Tibet to wish a fruitful harvest

In 1950, Gelong was born in NO.1 Nyanze village (the present name). He has been gifted for art since childhood. From 1972 to 1977, he was the literature cadreman in company of troop in the enlistment. At that period of learning, he was capable of numbered musical notation, erhu, flute, and folk dance etc. At the same time, he also got culture knowledge and improved his Chinese in the night school of troop. Five years army life laid a solid foundation for Gelong to strut his stuffs. He used to be an accountant and administrator in the unit of geography department of Tibet before his retirement from the army. His wife used to be the vice secretary of Chinese Communist Party of Nyanze, and vice director of NO.1 Nyanze village's committee before her retirement, as well. So Gelong's family lives in NO.1 Nyanze village all along. Therefore, ever since the establishment of a-ce-lha-mo team, Gelong has been concerned about its development. He often watches the performances and gives instructive advice at times. Meanwhile, he also takes part in editing the layout of the plays.

In 1991, after Gelong's retirement, the township government and the members of Tibetan Opera team invited him to be full time manager in taking charge of the team which was closed to disband. In the team, Gelong turned his talents in art and management to good account. He kept some traditional Tibetan operas as well as added some new lively Tibetan folk music dances into the layout. He expanded the team to 24 people and turned the free performance to charged one. The Tibetan Opera team and its members were transferred to professional level and specialization. Every slack farming season, Gelong leaded the team members performing in counties around Lhasa such as Duilongdengqin, Mozhugongda, Dazhi, Linzhou etc, sometimes they would perform for the farming herdsmen in country pasture areas in farther place like Linzhi, Naqu, Ali and so on. The team performed in open spaces and could earn 600 to 700 Yuan each time. Through the performances, the Nyanze Tibetan Opera team was famous and gradually creating its trend, and accumulated some capital.

Since 1993, some certified restaurants for tourism in Lhasa also invited Gelong and his team to perform for their guests. Despite that, some star hotels like Lhasa hotel also contacted Gelong to discuss the performance details from the beginning of 1998. The performing place of the team gradually settled down in Lhasa, and this spared the team members from the hardships of traveling away from home. Instead of waiting for the holidays to perform, they now are specializing on tourism business. They make contracts with many hotels, places of entertainment and vacation villages to perform in various celebrations. They were even hired for private wedding ceremonies. In these ways, they earned more. And it was at this period; Gelong's team finished stryping-down and implementing independent accounting and took on full responsibility for the success of their business. What is more, the name Nyaze A-ce-lha-mo Team was changed to Nyaze Folk Art Troupe. The change of name indicated that they had changed their performances from Tibetan operas only to Tibetan operas as the main part with Tibet folk music and dances. Thus, they enriched the performing contents and increased the performing forms. This catered for the demand of "ethnic diversities" in the consuming market. In 1987, the troupe won the first prize in the Tibetan Opera and Aria Show held by Lhasa Bureau of Culture. In 2002, they were invited by a performance company in Beijing to have a three-month performance of Tibetan operas and Tibetan folk dances. They received warm welcomes from Beijing citizens and raised their fame. What was more, with the approvals of International Communication Office, CCCPC³ and Ministry of Culture, Five Countries Movie Net Organization paid a special shooting visit to Lhasa for their Tibetan opera called pad-ma-vod-vbo. The video produced a hot reaction in foreign countries. And the team members were very proud of this. In cultural working conference of the whole region which was held in September, 2002, the troupe was rewarded with the name of Advanced Collective of Culture in the Whole Region. In 2003, they took part in the Tibetan New Year Show held by Tibet municipal area TV station and Lhasa TV station respectively. They also performed in Dazhi county and Qushui county along with the "heart and heart" art troupe. In March, 2003, in the hall of China National

³ Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

Radio, the troupe joined the performing activities of Happy Get-together in Beijing.

They performed Zhaxibaxue 、 Duixie and Yak dance for the audients in Beijing.

Besides, every Tibetan new year, Xuedun festival , and national day, they would be invited by the superior government department and host organizer to perform along with the professional acting groups in Buluolinca and other places.

After professional guiding and training, the folk art troupe now can perform 8

traditional A-ce-lha-mo as following: chos-rgyal-nor-bzang 、 zhuo-wa-sang-

mu 、gzugs-kyi-nyi-ma、pad-ma-vod-vbar、a-lca-rgya-z、snang-sa-vod-vbum、don-yod-

don-grub 、 dri-med-kun-ldan and etc. More than that, the troupe can perform

Duixie、 Langma、 Jiangmu and modern opusculums. They also add some Tibetan folk

music and dances of different regions in Tibet such as drum dance, divinity dance, guozhuang dance,herd dance, Xieqin as well as Gongbu dance⁴. These regional folk

music and dances are edited by Gelong himself or edited by professionals. In order to

cater for the market needs and guarantee the qualities of the programs, Gelong is also

positive to keep in touch with many other troupes like Municipal Artists House,

Municipal Song and Dance Troupe and Municipal Tibetan Opera Troupes. He also

hires advisors to give team members art directions, or sends his members out for

training. The members of the troupe are training strictly and professionally. “In the

past, we did not have formal Tibetan opera costumes and props, actors dressed up

variously on playing, and just put on a sheepskin mask. However, now all of our

performing costumes and props are made by special factories.” Gelong told me. In

addition, the troupe bought instruments like Cymbalo, guitar, trumpet, drum, flute and

⁴ A kind of dance comes from Linzhi region, Tibet.

so on. There is also a spacious and bright rehearsing hall in the two-floor building built two years ago.

At present, the folk troupe consists of local peasants who are professional actors. The troupe now has all together 64 members. The oldest one is 76 years old, while the youngest one is 14 years old. The average age of the troupe member is 22 years old. The troupe played 700 times or so in 2002 and gained gross income of 425 thousand Yuan with a capital income of 6500. The key actors could earn as much as 12,000 Yuan a year. The fixed asset of the troupe has increased from zero to 3 million Yuan. Now the troupe has two Toyota ground cars as well as one Xiali hatchback. At the same time, they lease out ten storefronts with frontages. What is more, there are a small hotel in the troupe' courtyard, a milk cow base, a prefab factory and a workshop of chong. Despite all these, they are planning to build a hogger. Therefore their earning is quite considerable now.

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