CHAPTER NINE

THE ECONOMICS OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

SUSAN E. COSTELLO

The twenty-odd years since the end of the Cultural Revolution, and a new era of reform and opening (gege kaifang) policies, have witnessed a revival of Tibetan culture in China. There have been truly encouraging increases in the numbers of individuals literate in Tibetan, in the number of books published in Tibetan, and in the variety of new and traditional art forms available for public consumption. More recently, however, further economic and structural reforms have shifted the financial burden of cultural production away from the central government, and more to local governments, private consumers, and a variety of charitable individuals and institutions.

For the purposes of this report on research in progress, by ‘cultural production’ I mean both the training of educated individuals, and the production of cultural artifacts, such as books or folk opera performances. In examining the economics behind these projects, I will describe the sources of their funding, and the considerations producers and consumers make in the production, distribution and consumption processes. My point here is to indicate the current trends in the financial support of Tibetan cultural products. The overall trend is towards more dependence upon market forces and for the government and other outside parties to commit fewer resources, such as subsidies.

First, I will consider the economics of education—comparing Tibetan-medium education, purely Chinese-language education and Tibetan Buddhist monastic education in terms of both the costs of attending school, and the earning potential of graduates. Second, I

1 The fieldwork on which this report on research in progress is based was made financially possible in part by the Committee for Scholarly Communication with China, to whom I am most grateful. At the time of writing, I have spent 14 months in the field.
will investigate the economics of publishing books and newspapers in Tibetan, comparing the costs of modern publishing methods with traditional printing using carved wooden printing blocks, as well as examining the diversification in the sources of funding for publishing. Third, I will consider the development of more popular forms of art and entertainment—touring stage troupes, both one financed by a government work unit, as well as a project that has approval but lacks financial support from the government.

Throughout this paper, I will focus upon Tongren County in Qinghai Province, which includes all of the farming areas and part of the nomad areas, which constitute the region traditionally referred to as Ruo gong. I will describe how Tibetan cultural production in Tongren is and is not representative of Amdo as a whole, and also make comparisons with the whole Tibetan area in China as far as my data allows.

Tongren County seat, Rong bo town, is also the seat of the capital of Ruo loo Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in the southeast corner of Qinghai Province. Tongren is located in the ecological zone where irrigated agriculture shifts to pure animal husbandry as the elevation of the land rises. It also lies just between very densely populated farming areas to its north, where Tibetan farmers live among many Han Chinese and Hui farmers, and sparsely populated but relatively rich areas to its south and west, which are inhabited by Tibetan and some Mongolian pastoral nomads. According to government statistics, Tongren has a population density of 21.1 persons/km² and a total population of 71,385, of whom about 75% are Tibetan farmers or pastoralists, and only about 15% are ethnic Han Chinese or Hui Muslims. The traditional architecture of the large and famous Rong bo monastery of the Dge lugs pa sect dominates Rong bo town.

For various reasons, Tongren Tibetans seem to enjoy a relatively more developed Tibetan cultural economy. Most locals agree that the Tibetans of Tongren are more literate in Tibetan than most other Tibetan areas. This is partly because of the density of Tibetan speakers in the countryside, compared with the mixed ethnic situation to the north and also the lower population densities in the nomad areas, which makes schooling difficult. There is also the fact that Tibetan-medium education was contin-

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ued through the Cultural Revolution in Tongren. Furthermore, the presence of several active monasteries, especially Rong bo monastery, in and near the town, as well as a revival local thang ka painting tradition (see Stevenson in this volume), have both given Tongren residents a strong institutional base for promoting Tibetan Buddhist cultural knowledge and art. This has seen many Tibetans from the area willing to make commitments to, and sacrifices for the production of Tibetan culture beyond what a purely cost-benefit analysis would recommend.

**Education**

In this section I will first describe the main choices for education available to the residents of Tongren, and then compare their costs and benefits as perceived by local parents and educators. I will show how the level of subsidies has changed in recent history, and compare the ability of local families to be able to afford education for their children. I will then assess the relevance of these educational choices for various livelihoods. Finally, I will describe some new sources of funding for local education, and assess prospects for the future.

**The Choices**

Ever since the Chinese state established the secular school system in Tibetan areas, its main purpose has been to train members of the minority nationalities to work in the government and communist party offices. Most basically, they needed to translate, and to disseminate policy directives to the local people in their own language. Also, the system hoped to train members of minority nationalities to help implement these policies, and thus gain greater legitimacy to their rule. Therefore, education in the early period was focused upon developing language skills. Today, in state schools, language is still a central focus of the curriculum. Students in Tibetan areas often have a choice in state education between Chinese and Tibetan—actually bilingual—medium schools. Students in Chinese medium schools study Chinese and English, as well as mathematics, politics, history, science, and so on, all in Chinese medium. Those in Tibetan medium schools study Tibetan and Chinese, and the other subjects in a mix of
Chinese and Tibetan medium. Most Tibetan schools do not teach English at all, and if they do, it is as a secondary subject—because Tibetans are not required to take exams in English to continue on to high school or college, they cannot afford to spend much time on it.

A third choice of education is traditional monastic education. This can vary widely in quality and scope, depending on the size of the local monastery and the level of scholarship of its resident monks. Many monks at small monasteries do not even learn to read Tibetan, and focus instead on the performance of rituals for the benefit of the community, memorising the prayers by heart. But if one’s intention is to learn to read Tibetan, a place with a relative can usually be found in a larger monastery. The subjects then studied are those contained in classical religious texts: grammar, religion, logic, astronomy and medicine, and so on, all of which are studied in Tibetan. A monk can also study other subjects, such as Chinese, provided he can find another monk who is willing and able to instruct him. Some monasteries, in fact many in Tongren county, have a tradition of thang ka painting, and this skill may be passed down among monks, and to lay persons as well, although usually only to relatives. Monks may also learn other useful skills while in the service of the monastery, such as driving a truck or managing the monastery’s financial affairs. In a few cases, monks who act as tour guides to foreigners may receive English language training.

Choice among these three alternatives is limited by a number of factors. The vast majority of Tibetans attend Tibetan medium state schools for two main reasons. Firstly, because there are very few Chinese children in the countryside, Chinese medium education is generally available only to those Tibetans living in or near the county town. Second, there is a general consensus that Tibetans do not learn well in Chinese medium, it being assumed they just do not understand the language well enough to be successfully taught, for example, physics in Chinese. Thirdly, many Tibetan parents feel that the most important thing for their children to learn is to be able to read prayers in Tibetan.

There are many obstacles to choosing the monastic route to education. Government regulations require that children wait until they are at least 18 years old before entering a monastery, presumably because they should reach adult age in order to make a responsible decision, which their parents should not make for them. While this is not strictly enforced, it does create difficulties. If boys wait until they are 18 to enter the monastery, they will already have developed many habits inappropriate for a monk. People say that this makes it hard for them to remain monks for the rest of their lives. In Tongren, the Rong bo monastery, which is very close to government offices, is strictly controlled. Because of the regulation, underage monks were discouraged from staying in the monastery, and sent home. But some young novices were very determined to remain monks, and would run away from home, back to the monastery. Finally, they were allowed to stay. Setting up a structured education program for them was more difficult, however, and only through the determination of the monastery’s leaders has this been allowed on a small scale. For a number of reasons, most basically the low status of women in Amdo in general, and especially in farming areas like Tongren, it is almost impossible for girls to take the monastic option of education. There are very few nunneries, most of which have very few resources, and girls cannot be taught in monasteries.

The Costs

In recent years, the costs of education have soared, and a greater and greater proportion of this burden has been placed on individuals and families. In Tongren, because most Tibetans are farmers with two or more children, they are much less able to bear this burden compared to the local Chinese, who are mostly bureaucrats with only one child to send to school.

Tuition is not determined by the nationality of the student, but varies among schools, and by grade. In an incomplete survey, I found that the three-year total of tuition, fees and books for a student graduating from junior high school in 1999 was about Yuan 9407 for Chinese medium instruction, and on average about Yuan 710 for Tibetan medium. In this case, Tibetan language instruction cost only about 75% of that for Chinese. This does not seem to be the result of any fiscal policy preferential to minorities, but local parents say that higher costs are reflected in better facilities, such as more fully equipped science laboratories.

7 At the time of writing, Yuan 8.07 = U.S.$1.00.
Primary school costs are much lower, although the decrease in book subsidies is increasing the burden. In the early 1980s, elementary school students in Tongren paid Yuan 2 per semester in school fees, and since 1985 this has increased to Yuan 5. This fee, however, is designated for school office expenses, and the school has the option of waiving this fee in cases of hardship. In the past, the county has made up any shortfall in the office needs of schools. Recently, there has been at least one instance of the county failing to give money for office expenses. What has increased much more significantly, is the cost of and the degree of subsidy for textbooks. In the early 1980s, textbooks were provided free of charge. From 1985 to 1990 students had to pay 30% of the cost of their textbooks. Since 1995 students have had to pay the full cost themselves. The fees collected for attendance at Chinese medium primary schools are much higher.

In recent years, education costs have been increasing particularly sharply. At one Tibetan medium middle school, for example, tuition and fees for a year of junior middle school increased from Yuan 30 in 1990 to Yuan 120 in 1999. Even more alarming, however, is the speed with which new charges are being added and existing charges are increasing. Charges for exit exam registration and graduation certificate preparation are relatively new, although they already run at about Yuan 100 for a graduating senior. Locals told me that these fees have mushroomed in recent years in response to reductions in government subsidies.

What is less evident is the recent lack of systematic support for capital improvements. I did not hear of new schools, school buildings or renovations being budgeted for by local county governments. Instead, there was much talk about new schools being built with donations from businesses in China, from individuals from Hong Kong, Japan and the West, and from international aid organisations, such as the United Nations (see Orofino in this volume). Some of those donors were directed to Tongren by the central or provincial government. Others were led to the area by local religious leaders who had met them during travel or residence in developed areas of China. As the central government enacts reforms, it has withdrawn itself somewhat from directly subsidising local projects. Instead, it assigns local units to economically developed areas in eastern China, who are made responsible for providing some developmental aid. Local governments have been plagued for years with difficulties in meeting their ever-growing salary and pension obligations, which are prioritised, so it seems unlikely they will come forward to commit resources to capital improvements. If systematic help is not forthcoming from the government, this burden is likely to fall more and more upon individuals. Recently, two Tibetan medium middle schools in Tongren equipped themselves with computers, but did this by taking out loans. They plan to repay the loans through mandatory fees of Yuan 70 per student per semester. One informant expressed fear at this trend, that the burden on students increasing every year would prohibit poorer students from attending school.

Economic Demography

The most fundamental difference in the economics of local Tibetans and Chinese is that the vast majority of Tibetans are farmers, while most Chinese are employed in the offices of the Rma lho prefectural government or the Tongren county government. The difference between local rural Tibetans and urban Chinese is compounded by the facts of larger family size and a language barrier for Tibetans.

According to government statistics, in Tongren County the average net per capita income for village dwellers was Yuan 1,378 in 1997, while the average city or town staff or worker earned a salary of Yuan 7,409. The discrepancy between rural and urban dwellers has been further exacerbated recently by the “Great Opening of the Western Regions” (Xibu da kaifa) policy initiatives, one of which was to give significant pay increases to all salaried government workers, supposedly in the hope that it will trickle down and stimulate the private sector economy. When these annual incomes are compared to education costs (see Table 1) we can see that education is a much greater burden on Tibetan families, even though actual costs are lower.

Family planning policies, which allow Tibetans to have more children than Han Chinese, have the effect of making the burden of education heavier for Tibetan families. Minority nationalities, including Tibetans, are allowed two, and in some cases, three children, compared with a fairly strictly enforced single child policy.
Table 1: Relative Burden of Educational Expenses (in Yuan)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average per capita annual income</th>
<th>Cost of 3 year course of lower-middle school in native language</th>
<th>Cost as % of 3 years of income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tongren village dwellers (Tibetan)</td>
<td>1,378</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Dzogqal urban workers (Chinese)</td>
<td>7,409</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for Han. While this concession is made partly to placate fears that Han Chinese will soon become majorities in minority areas, it also results in a kind of impoverishment in the development of human capital. In discourse, many local people blame the poor ‘quality’ of individuals, which is accredited mainly to their lack of education, for the state of economic development in Tibetan areas. Allowing more than one child per family doubles the already onerous burden on Tibetans.

**Benefits**

In order for Tibetan families to continue to support their children’s education, they must believe that the benefits outweigh the costs. While worldly benefits, such as a government job with a secure salary and housing subsidies, are easy to measure, other-worldly benefits are much harder to measure and compare.

For Tibetans, religious considerations still play a very strong part in family decisions about livelihoods. Many families still support their sons’ desires to enter a monastery, despite the growing social pressure for higher standards of consumption and the loss of potential income their sons might have earned in worldly pursuits. Yet, the number of monks in Rong bo monastery is experiencing a natural decrease, as fewer monks than before are entering the monastery, and more monks are leaving after a period of study. This trend suggests that families and individuals are finding the benefits of life-long monasticism less attractive than other occupational choices. This is in contrast to at least some nomadic areas of Amdo, and some farming areas in Sichuan, Rnga ba County in particular, where the monastery seems to remain the educational institution of choice.

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2 3-year income here is 1997 annual income multiplied by three.

Of course, first of all, families must choose whether to formally educate their children or not. Many people feel that sending a child to school ruins them for physical labour. Because they don’t get used to labouring in the fields, or herding livestock when they are young, if they fail to get a salaried job in the government, children come home and are unsuited to work in primary production. While some subjects, like mathematics and Chinese, teach skills useful in doing petty trade, most of the curriculum is impractical for students not continuing on to specialised high schools or college.

Enrolment rates are thus dropping as the prospects for securing a government job upon graduation are narrowing. With the end of the state job assignment system, graduates are no longer guaranteed a job, and those few jobs that do become available are increasingly likely to be awarded on the basis of family connections rather than the merit of the candidate. Thus, those graduates with relatives already in the government have some hope to obtain a government job, but the common people without proper connections are locked out. This inevitably will further increase the rural-urban income disparity, as government salaries are increasingly concentrated in fewer families.

In secular education, a calculated comparison of benefits between Chinese-medium education and Tibetan-medium education seems to be rarely made. Most often, because of remote location, Tibetan-medium education is the only schooling available at the primary level. Although parents could theoretically switch their children to Chinese-medium schools at higher levels, this is very rarely done. Tibetans go to Tibetan-medium schools for a variety of reasons, including the benefit of more effective understanding of the educational content, respect for their own culture, and the ability at least to be able to read prayers in Tibetan. Job prospects also appear to be better for those Tibetans literate in Tibetan, since Han Chinese basically cannot do jobs that require the writing or speaking of Tibetan, such as translating, editing or teaching Tibetan students. Of course, many Tibetans who study in Chinese-medium schools—as far as I have heard, all children of government employees—do get jobs in the government. In the process, however, many lose or fail to develop the ability to speak Tibetan well—a fate bemoaned by many, but acceptable to some as the cost of obtaining a government job. Rural Tibetans seem to
feel, probably with good reason, either that their children will not compete well academically with their Han Chinese classmates, or that they will lose some facility in Tibetan, and thus they do not even consider sending their children to Chinese-medium schools.

Future trends in educational options are unclear. The government is faced with the momentum of a system that now produces many high school graduates literate in Tibetan, and with only mediocre Chinese language skills. Until recently, these graduates could be well used as translators or teachers, but now these openings are filling up. Either a wider variety of post-secondary educational programs in Tibetan-medium need to be developed, or these high school graduates need to be re-trained in Chinese so they may study other subjects appropriate to the needs of their diversifying local economies. Some materials are in fact being developed, often with the help of foreign funds, but progress is painfully slow, while at the same time the number of unemployed graduates is increasing rapidly.

Publishing

Books

There are now eight publishing houses that publish Tibetan language books in China, and a growing number of printing houses with the capability to print books in Tibetan. The publishing houses receive subsidies from various government organs, which I believe pay for salaries and some overhead costs. The Nationalities Publishing House (Mi rigs dpe kun khang, Chin. Minzu Chubansho) in Beijing, for example, receives Yuan 800,000 annually for each of the three minority languages they publish: Tibetan, Korean, and Mongolian. Each Tibetan-language publishing house has an annual plan for publishing, either writing the manuscripts in-house, editing classic texts, or accepting manuscripts from outside. In recent years, many of these publishing houses have gone beyond their original plans, and have not only been accepting more manuscripts from outside, but also the money to publish them. This has resulted in a great increase in the number of books published in Tibetan throughout China. Even more recently, these publishing houses have been retraining in this practice, perhaps because of the lower quality of many of the manuscripts they receive.

The publishing industry has proven too large for me to be able to complete a comprehensive survey of these trends. However, I have learned that the financing of this increase in production comes from a number of sources. The largest proportion of direct financing seems to come from monasteries and incarcentre lamas who pay, or who ask their wealthy disciples to pay, for publication of their own biographies or monastery histories. Other authors find local businessmen, relatives, or classmates to donate or lend money for these projects. Those wishing to economise on the publishing process can often get friends to type or edit their works for no charge. Finally, a proportion of books, including a large number of textbooks and other educational materials, are financed by overseas funds, including the United Nations Development Program, Tibetan lamas living overseas, and other private foundations.

When comparing the retail prices of modern printed and bound books with those paid for religious classics printed as xylographs in the traditional loose folio format in the monasteries, one first has to realise that many Tibetans regard it as a sin to make a profit from the printing of the Buddha’s word. Thus, theoretically, monasteries should sell books strictly at cost price. The largest monasteries in Amdo, Sku束um and Ila-hrang, employ monks to print folios, and, as far as I currently know, their salaries are subsidised by the monastery, which itself receives funds from the government. Rong bo monastery in Tongren receives Yuan 80 per 100,000 syllables of text. This compares to Yuan 8 for a 100,000 syllable modern printed and bound text published by the Nationalities Publishing House in 1999. While traditional printing is more costly now, this may become an economically viable option, especially for books for which printing blocks already exist, because of the very sharp increases in book prices in China at the present time.

In short, despite a small Tibetan reading population, the Tibetan language book publishing industry appears to have a diver-
sity of charitable support that bodes well for its continuing develop-

Newspapers

In addition to the publishing of books, another venue for promo-
ting the use and development of Tibetan language is through the
publication of Tibetan language newspapers. Because the sub-

ject of what is printed is mostly news (see Hartley in this vol-

ume), and because most of the articles are translated from Chi-
nese, reading a Tibetan language newspaper should enable Tibet-
an to better understand and use newly developed terminology
relevant to policy reform and economic development. This is

important for enriching their own language because many Tibet-
an currently use the more familiar Chinese terms for these sub-

jects, even when speaking Tibetan.

While both the Qinghai Tibetan News (Masho sangon bod yig
gsar 'gycen), which is published every other day, and the Tibet
Daily (Bo drag nyin re'i thangs par) have been published since the
1950s, more specialised law, science and technology, and

youth newspapers published in both Qinghai and the Tibet

Autonomous Region (TAR) have been started only in the last 20

years. In total, of all Tibetan language newspapers, about 22 issues

per month are published in Qinghai, while the number is at least
twice that in the TAR. Outside these areas, the 3 Tibetan

Autonomous Prefectures of Kham, Ngari and Amdo publish their

own Tibetan language newspaper 3 times per week. Newspaper
prices outside the TAR run about 0.3 per issue, and in the TAR
only about 0.1. While it is well for the Tibet Daily. However, subscriptions are almost all

government work units and cover only a small fraction of the

actual costs of printing. The shortfall is covered by the

Propaganda Department of the Communist Party.

Although the Party Committee tells all work units that they

should buy the Qinghai Tibetan News, this is not enforced in

Qinghai, and since the early 1990s subscriptions have been drop-
ing. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the main con-
tent of the newspaper, news, is at least 2 or 3 days old at the time

go to the post office to pick them up. Because of this, very few

private individuals subscribe. Finally, many of the office leaders in

Tibetan areas of Qinghai are Chinese, and under new economic

pressure, they are unwilling to pay even the token. Yuan 54 per

year for the Qinghai Tibetan News. In essence, the problem of
distribution results in the supplying of Tibetan newspapers to

those Tibetans who work in the government, and who thus know

Chinese well, and who do not really need the Tibetan version of

the paper. Those who do not know Chinese well do not have easy

access to newspapers, unless a relative brings a copy home from

the office, which in fact is a regular practice.

Despite low rates of subscriptions and a very inefficient distri-
bution system, Tibetan newspapers do not seem to be in danger of
closing down. So far, there have been two responses to decreasing

subscriptions. In Qinghai, in 1996, a new editor was called in for

the Qinghai Tibetan News and a shift in content was made away

from politics, to a variety of practical subjects such as law, educa-
tion, translation methods and livestock economy. However, sub-

scriptions to this newspaper are still falling. In Lhasa, when sub-

scriptions to the Tibet Daily got down to a mere 1,000 in the mid-

1990s, the government decided to force all government work

units to subscribe to it, as well as to six other periodicals. Money

for these subscriptions was to be taken out of staff salaries. In-

stantly, subscriptions rose to more than 15,000.

In addition to having access to the Qinghai Tibetan newspa-
pers, Tongren, by virtue of being in Rma lho Tibetan Autono-
mous Prefecture, has enjoyed the trial period of a new newspaper,

the Rma lho Tibetan News, since November 1999. Rma lho is

now the only sub-region in the Tibetan areas of China, besides

Lhasa and Gzhus ga, to have both a local and a regional news-
paper. The Chinese edition of this paper, the Rma lho News was

founded in 1991, to better serve the information needs of devel-

oping the economy. The advent of the Tibetan edition seems to

be a step to further encourage and enable Tibetans to engage suc-

cessfully in business. It may be directed at those literate in Ti-

betan but not Chinese, a population that would include monks, ex-

monks, and other individuals and others who did not receive a

formal education in a state school. Those Tibetan speakers who

attended state schools, despite having studied Chinese, may still

prefer to read in Tibetan, but it remains unclear to me whether, in
their case, a Tibetan newspaper is filling a gap in news awareness. Distribution of the paper is still dependent on work unit subscriptions, however, and restricted mainly to the county towns. While those Tibetans outside the county towns, and those who want fresh news, may rely on Tibetan language radio, the importance of a wide awareness of economic news for the development of the economy, plus the generous resources of the Propaganda Department, make this venue for the use of Tibetan language one in which we can hope to see further positive developments.

**Performing Arts**

In general, touring Amdo Tibetan performing arts troupes have difficulty surviving on their own because of the small size, sparse distribution and relative poverty of Amdo dialect speakers. Their ability to draw audiences has also suffered recently with the proliferation, though limited in the Tibetan area, of cable and satellite television. Those in the business say that local audiences prefer shows with a lot of variety in the types of acts, or shows that specialize in comedy or Tibetan guitar playing. Some of these styles of performance, particularly those that can be done with very few performers, can be very profitable. Drama and dance troupes must share the same profit among many more performers.

The Rma lho Prefecture Song and Dance Troupe, which also serves as the government song and dance troupe for Tongren County, was founded in 1965. In 1999 they also added the designation Qinghai Tibetan Drama Troupe to their name, because of their development of a repertoire of both traditional and new Tibetan folk operas. While the government continues to pay staff salaries, in 1996 it stopped giving the troupe money for regular operating costs, which they must now generate through their ticket revenues and from the rest of the stores on their property. They are required by the government to perform 50 to 60 shows a year, as service to the people. Most of the townships they play in are small, and they cannot charge a high price for a ticket, so they do not make much of a profit when they are on tour. While the government no longer makes a commitment to regularly pay for new costumes or scenery, the troupe can ask the government for money. Because they have recently won many prizes for their folk opera performances, the government is usually willing to give at least part of the amount they request.

One important loss of financial support is in funding for the development of talent. Previously, on average twelve members of the 54-member troupe were supported at any one time in further study. That has been reduced to one or two per year. Also, previously, the government supported a class of local students to study song and dance in a specialized high school in the provincial capital, the best of whom would be assigned jobs in the troupe. This support has ended. The Rma lho troupe is better positioned to survive on its own, if necessary, than other troupes in the Amdo area, because it balances variety in the types of acts it uses with specialization in performances of Tibetan singing and dancing. This troupe is more popular in Tibetan areas because they dance Tibetan dances better than the Qinghai Province Song and Dance Troupe, which has many Han Chinese members, and because they perform a great variety of minority acts. With the development of the troupe’s ability to perform folk opera, their economic viability has increased. Because they can thus offer a greater variety of acts, their shows are popular when they tour. Even when they perform in Chinese cities, like Xining or Beijing, if they prepare subtitles in Chinese to be shown on the auditorium wall, and publicize this, Han Chinese will also come to see their performances. But because they are mainly limited to playing in the Amdo-speaking area, the whole troupe cannot tour continually, and thus they are still very dependent upon the government for their salaries. Fortunately, there are no current plans to further reduce government support. If salary support is reduced or eliminated in the future, they will probably have to reduce the troupe size, and members would have to perform a greater variety of performance and support tasks.

Secondly, I would like to describe the new phenomenon of a performing arts troupe which is officially part of a government work unit, but which receives no financial support from the government. There had been a provincial level Tibetan modern drama troupe active in the 1960s, and despite many calls for its reinstatement, a lack of will at higher levels, and thus a lack of funding, has kept this from happening. Finally, with a change in leadership at the West Lake Music Recording Publishers, one in-
individual who was pushing for the reinstatement of a Tibetan modern drama troupe was given the chance to do this. Their work unit was prepared to approve the formation of this new drama troupe, which was to be called the White Conch Art Association. However, the work unit concerned gave no money to support the venture, and instead required the payment of between Yuan 5,000 and 10,000 for the use of the work unit’s name.

In the summer of 1998, the White Conch Art Association went on their first tour of 5 weeks travelling the county towns of Amdo, with 18 performers and rented equipment and vehicles. They played drama and comedy, and their membership included a number of famous comedians who are usually good at drawing a crowd. Perhaps because of the popularity of some of their performers, they were able to make a small profit in spite of the low turnouts and high fees they had to pay at many of their venues. But this kind of troupe has a limited audience, and can only exist as a yearly summer enterprise. Without government salary subsidies, such a troupe cannot exist on its own—those who tour must have other sources of income for the rest of the year. Such troupes must also have performers who are already fully developed, since there is no funding for any training. Despite the difficulties of poor institutional support and low profits, the White Conch Art Association was considering another tour in the summer of 2000.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention the continuing tradition of ritual performances in the monasteries. Their raison d’être and functions are completely different from the two touring performing arts troupes described above, but among other things, they do entertain the public (see Schrempf in this volume), thus I include them here briefly. Their economy is also completely different, as there is no admission price charged, and no hall rental fee or salaries paid. The necessary ritual objects and costumes are paid for mostly by a monastery’s reincarnate lamas and partly out of the monastery’s general funds, both of which are made up of voluntary contributions from the local community. With the performance of the traditional ritual dance (cham) around the time of the Tibetan New Year, in addition to being entertained, the public believes the community is freed from the malevolent spirits of the year past, and given a fresh start.

These cosmic benefits may result, it is believed, in economically calculable benefits such as good health, and good luck in business.

Summary

In summary, the fundamental conditions of a small and mostly poor population who are spread out over remote areas make the distribution of cultural products in Tibetan areas a considerable obstacle. Small, inexpensive objects, like books and even more so audiotapes, are popular purchases. Essentials, such as traditional clothing and bowls, with Tibetan decorations, also sell well, even though most office-working Tibetans only wear Tibetan clothes during festivals. Products that are harder to distribute, such as education, newspapers, and live dramatic performances face a logistic challenge compounded by the poverty of the potential consumers. Some of the costs of distribution are being alleviated as roads are built or improved, and as appropriate technology such as solar-generated electricity and satellite TV dishes are developed and distributed. Also encouraging is the diversification and physical spread to smaller towns of private businesses specializing in Tibetan cultural products, such as books and audiotapes.

In this difficult landscape, both government policies (and the degree of their successful implementation), and demographic trends will influence the fates of the various Tibetan cultural products discussed here. The general trend of retraction of the central government from many of its former supporting roles all over China may be somewhat counteracted in Tibetan areas by the effects of the Great Opening of the Western Regions policy initiatives. Education in particular, in its role of improving the quality of human resources, is stressed in current development policy rhetoric. While this is likely to have a positive long-term effect on economic development, the vast majority of jobs newly created by this initiative—in infrastructure construction and mining—are being filled by non-Tibetans from outside the Amdo area. While most of these jobs are relatively unskilled, there seems to be a lack of local Tibetans suitably trained to fill these technical and managerial jobs that are available. Certainly, at least one reason for this is the lack of Tibetan medium instruction in these fields.
Education is one of the heaviest burdens on both the government and on families, and thus the continuation of subsidies from outside the province is essential. There has been at least one announcement that, eventually, local governments will be completely responsible for funding education in their own area. If this becomes the case, very few Tibetan families will be able to send their children to any school, let alone Tibetan language schools. If the government takes to heart its own rhetoric about the importance of education and the right of minority nationalities to learn in their own language, they must continue to support Tibetan medium education and the further development of a wider diversity of educational materials. The historical decision to establish a large number of Tibetan medium primary and secondary schools has so far provided irresistible momentum to spur the albeit slow development of post-secondary education materials and institutions.

In publishing, it seems that books and newspapers will be able to continue to find financial support from government, as well as from both religious and secular local and foreign sources. Trends of increasing efforts in developing terminology and materials appropriate to building a modern economy, and the curriculum this requires, are very likely to continue. Questions of standardization of vocabulary and style will continue to challenge Tibetan scholars, both in government translating offices and in monasteries. In fact, some criticism of poorly written books published 'outside the plan' has caused some of the Tibetan language publishers to reduce or continue to strictly limit the number of self-financing projects they accept. Still, the growing numbers and diversity of books is encouraging. If Tibetan readers' disposable incomes rise with the increasing book prices, or if government and foreign subsidies continue or increase, we can look forward to a ongoing renaissance of Tibetan language publishing in the People's Republic of China.

Performance art genres may also flourish somewhat, if Tibetans' disposable income increases. However, the support for these projects seems less committed than the support for education, since performing arts are not viewed as crucial in the development of the economy. They will also face increasing competition from other forms of entertainment, as tastes spread deeper into the countryside. On the other hand, performances of minority nationality dancers have become a staple of the celebratory variety shows broadcast on national television on the occasions of national holidays. They are intended to provide reassuring evidence of the government's claim that China is a modern nation of happily united nationalities. While there is thus some support at the national level, there remains much doubt as to how much support will continue to trickle down to the large number of prefectural and county level song and dance troupes. There is also the danger that quality will suffer if this profession becomes a part-time career, and if the burden of financing training reverts to individuals. Of all the cultural products discussed here, the future of performance arts seems the least assured.

Tongren, as a traditional centre for arts and scholarship, has fared better in terms of the development of Tibetan cultural products than most places in Amdo. Part of this is due to historical and geographical factors, such as the existence of a tradition of thang ka painting and the location of many vital monasteries close together, this in turn is afforded by the relatively productive agriculture of the area. The fairly dense settlement that this agriculture allows has also made education efforts much more successful than in the nomadic pastoral areas of Amdo or in other Tibetan areas. Tongren continues to receive large subsidies from the provincial and central governments, but it cannot beat the huge subsidies currently received by nomads in Amdo (see Hirtlemann in this volume), for example, or those disbursed to Lhasa, China's showcase for its good treatment of Tibet to the outside world. For reasons still unclear to me, Tongren Tibetans have not succeeded in private business in the manner of some of their counterparts, such as those in Rasa in County in Sichuan Province, for example. Perhaps because they spend too much time studying their beloved Tibetan culture, they do not have the necessary financial resources to support it as they would like.

BIBLIOGRAPHY