Historicizing Tibetan Cultural Heritage Across Time And Space



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Abstract

Cultural heritage has been investigated widely all over the world through the lens of museum studies, tourism studies and etc. In this MA thesis project, I am proposing a possible model of examining Tibetan cultural heritage through performance studies, more specifically, dance studies by using three case studies. Instead of viewing Tibetan dance simply as a form of art or a type of media, I suggest it serves as a contact zone between not only Tibetan culture's past and today but also Tibetan culture and Chinese culture across different time and space. In addition to focusing on the contributions of Tibetan artists, I also would like to highlight the cross-ethnicity collaborations between Tibetan and non-Tibetan dance artists. The three case studies in this paper are "Reba from the Grassland" (1956), *Tibetan Myth* (2007) and *Tsangyang Gyatso* (2015) represent different sconfigurations of Tibetan cultural heritage during different time periods.

Why Dance?

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but "rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next."--- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

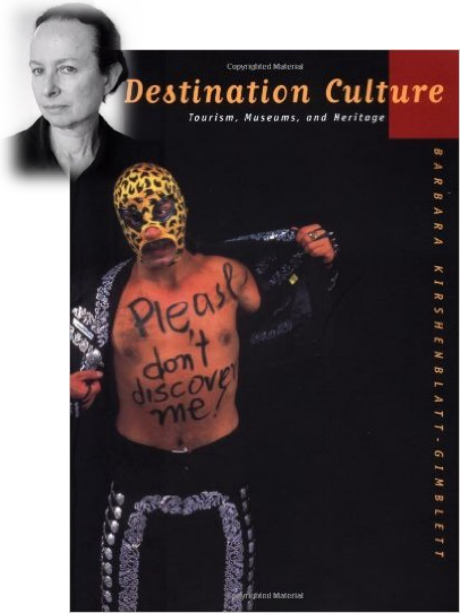
In 2003 UNESCO established the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), which became operational in 2008. The performing arts (including dance and other movement systems such as martial arts, ritual practices, and games) are central to its preservation[1].



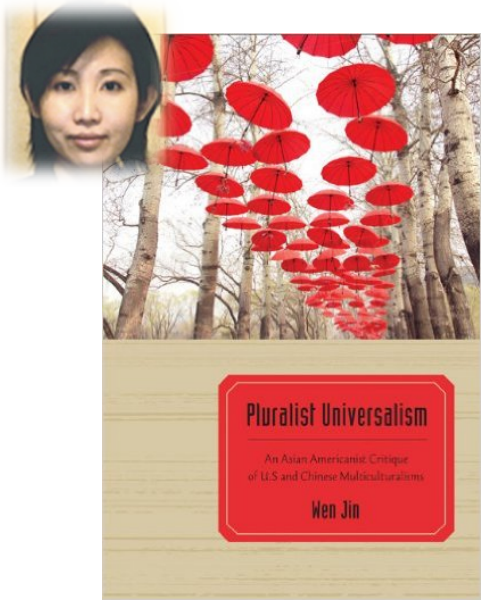
- **Program information refers to *https://www.ntnu.edu/studies/choreomundus/intangible-cultural***
- **Picture refers to http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49457#.VOSeErDF_gw**

Theories Applied:

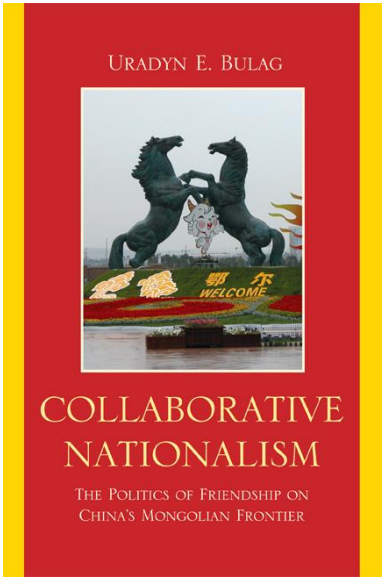
- **Intangible cultural heritage**
- **Multiculturalism**
- **Ethnic minority identity**



Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett
Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage



Wen Jin
Pluralist Universalism: An Asian Americanist Critique of U.S. and Chinese Multiculturalisms



Uradyn Erden Bulag
Collaborative Nationalism: The Politics of Friendship on China's Mongolian Frontier

Primary Sources

- **Newspaper articles (1920-2015)**:
  - *People's Daily* (PRC), *Guangming Daily* (PRC), *Da Gongbao* (Hong Kong), *Shenbao* (KMT) (50 in total Cf. Primary sources list)
- **Visual materials:**
  - **Photographs and video clips:**
    - *Luqu shenyun* [The charm of Luqu] (2015) by Luqu wenhua yanyi youxian gongsi (about 100 photographs and 1-hour video clips in total).
  - **Poster:** Wang, Jiao. (1961)*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo wansui* [Long live the People's Republic of China] [王角 1961 设计海报《中华人民共和国万岁》]
  - **Program:** *Luqu shenyun* [The charm of Luqu] (2015) by Luqu wenhua yanyi youxian gongsi (1 pamphlet including brief introduction of the dance drama). [节目单：碌曲神韵（2015）碌曲文化演艺有限公司包含舞剧内容简介]
  - **Pamphlet:** *Disijie Zhongguo Zangzu Guozhuang wu dasai ji luqu Xianglangjie hongdong zhinan* [Event instructions on No.4 National Tibetan Guozhuang dance competition as well as Xianglang Festival] (2015) (20 pages including Tibetan dance competation teams from Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai) [活动指南：第四届中国藏族锅庄舞大赛暨碌曲香浪节]
- **Oral histories:**
  - Interview: Oumijiacan (3 hours)
  - Interview: Xiang Yanghua (2 hours)
  - Interview: Lang Yongchun (1.5 hours)

Objectives

- ✓ Documenting historical materials related to Tibetan cultrual heritage
- ✓ Collecting visual materials of Tibetan dance performance, dance competition, etc
- ✓ Talk with Tibetan and non-Tibetan dance artists and try to understand different ways of cultural heritage in Tibetan culture.

Challenges

- Political sensitive topic
- Cultural conflicts
- Couldn’t get support from some Tibetan people because of my Chinese identity

What I Learned



- Oumijiacan was born in 1928 into a poor Tibetan farmer family in Batang, Sichuan Province, China. His hometown was famous for Xianzi, a kind of Tibetan folk dance. As part of his family dance team, he started his journey as a Xianzi dancer at age eight.
- In 1953, a group of artists and scholars from Beijing spotted him performing at a horse-race festival. After the festival, Oumijiacan was invited to join the China National Ethnic Song and Dance Ensemble.
- He became a star folk dance artist and choreographer. In 1957, Tibetan folk dance *Reba from the Grassland*, created and performed by Oumijiacan, won third prize in Moscow's World Youth Festival.

Figure 1: Omijiacan in Moscow, 1957. Photo courtesy of Oumijiacan.

What I Learned

- Aqian was a famous master of Reba dance, a kind of Tibetan folk dance. He was part of his family's third generation of Reba dance artists.
- Aqian was not only a successful merchant on the Tea Horse Road [1] but also the leader of his family Reba team. All of his family members including his wife, five sons and five daughters-in-law were all Tibetan folk dancers.
- Aqian passed his knowledge on to his sons and students by providing each dance's historical background, such as the story of *Mila Riba*, the inventor of Reba dance.



Figure 2: Horse merchant team on Tea Horse Road
See website of Yunnan Government
http://www.yn.gov.cn/yn_yngk/yn_whzy/201201/t20120104_2774.html

[1] It was a network of caravan paths winding through the mountains of Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou in Southwest China. In addition to tea, the mule caravans carried salt. Both people and horses carried heavy loads, the tea porters sometimes carrying over 60–90 kg, which was often more than their own body weight in tea. Cf. Forbes, Andrew, and Henley, David: *Traders of the Golden Triangle (A study of the traditional Yunnanese mule caravan trade)*. Chiang Mai. Cognoscenti Books, 2011.

What I Learned



Figure 3: Omijiacan et al. in " Festival Dance " 1956. Photo courtesy of Oumijiacan.

- **Experiencing the life and Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Foundation Celebration Show (1953-1956)**
  - **Experiencing the life** (Chinese: 体验生活Pinyin: Tiyan Shenghuo) was one of the most important parts of Oumijiacan's professional dancing training.
  - Together with other dancers in the China National Ethnic Song and Dance Ensemble, he went to Tibet, Yunnan and Sichuan province many times during the period from 1953 to 1956.
  - Based on his early life in Tibet and the experience he gained through experiencing the life, Oumijiacan created several pieces of folk dance work such as *Festival Dance* (Chinese:节日Pinyin: Jie Ri) and *Reba from the Grassland* (Chinese:草原上的热巴 Pinyin: Caoyuanshangde Reba)

What I Learned



- Removed some religious elements from his choreography
- Standardized process was part of a process of cultural authenticity
- Individual artists learned to identify and use folk culture elements as raw material in the making of a new national culture (Wilcox 2011)

Figure 4: Oumijiacan in Tibetan folk dance *Reba from the Grassland,* 1957. Photo courtesy of Oumijiacan.

Wilcox, Emily. 2011. "The Dialectics of Virtuosity : Dance in the People ' S Republic of China , 1949-2009."

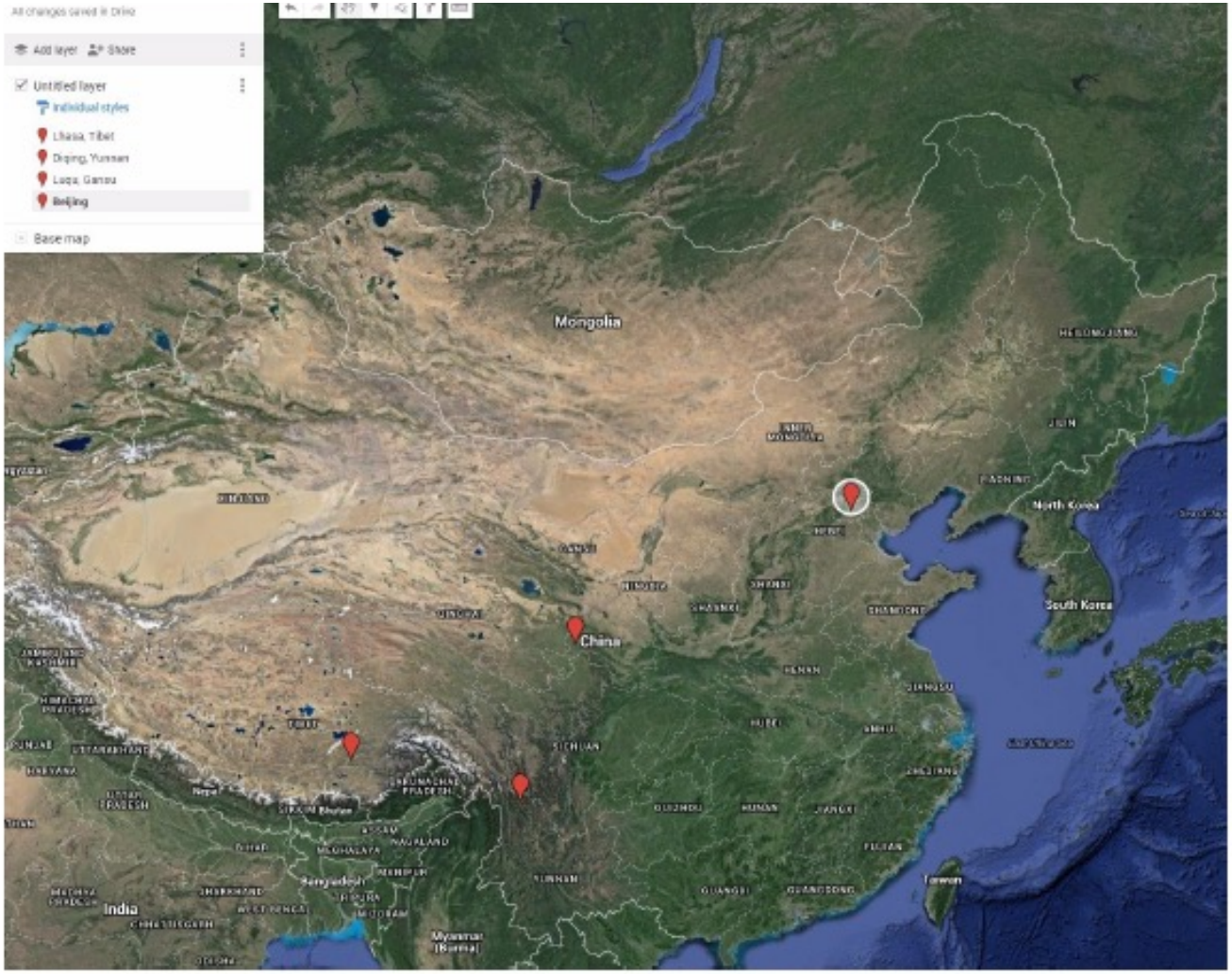
What I Learned



Figure 5: Xiang Yanghua (Zhuoma, left), Caidan zhuoma (central) and I at Lasa, Tibet. 2015/08/02 by author



Figure 6: Lang Yongchun (right) and I at Luqu,Gansu 2015/08/07 by author

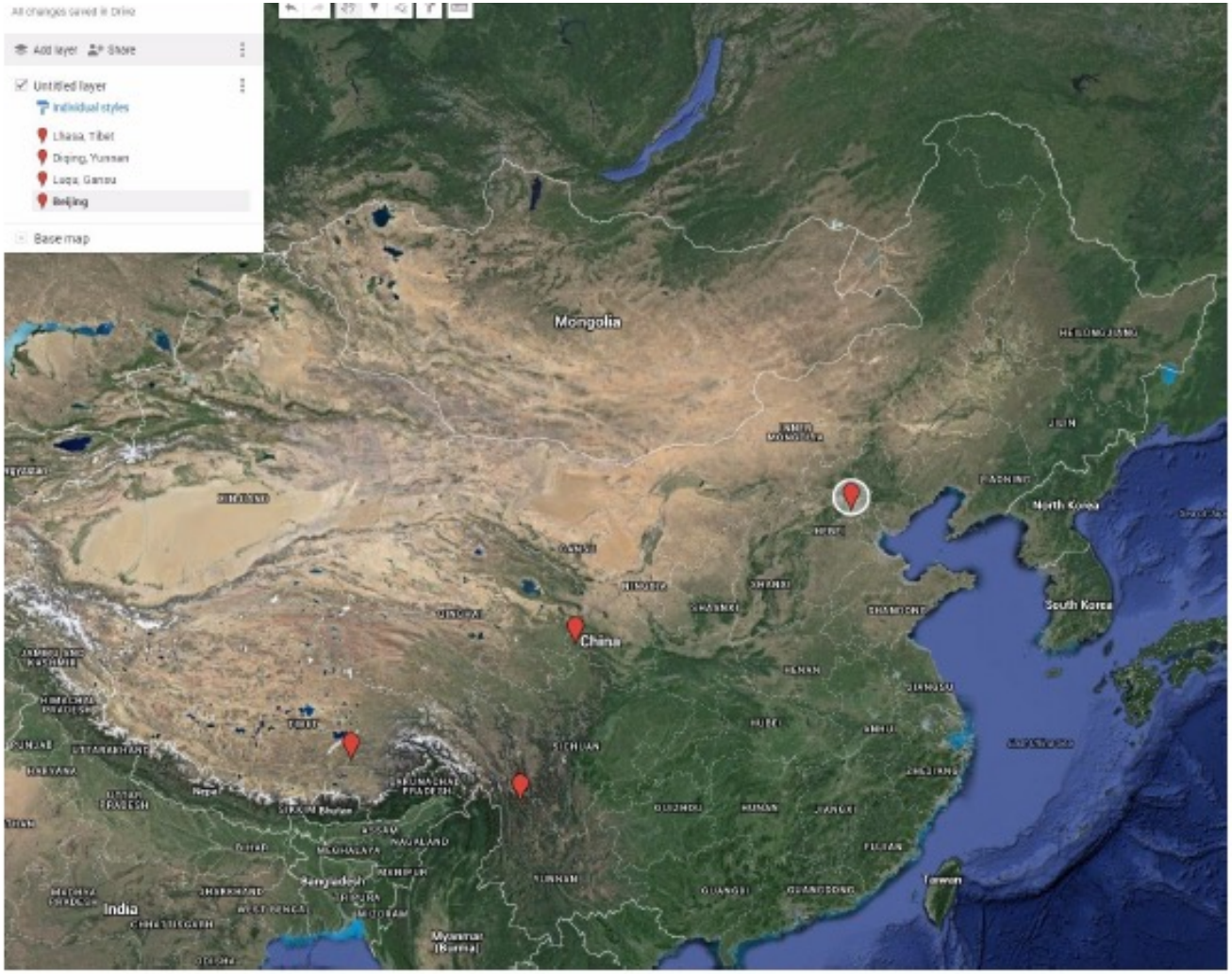


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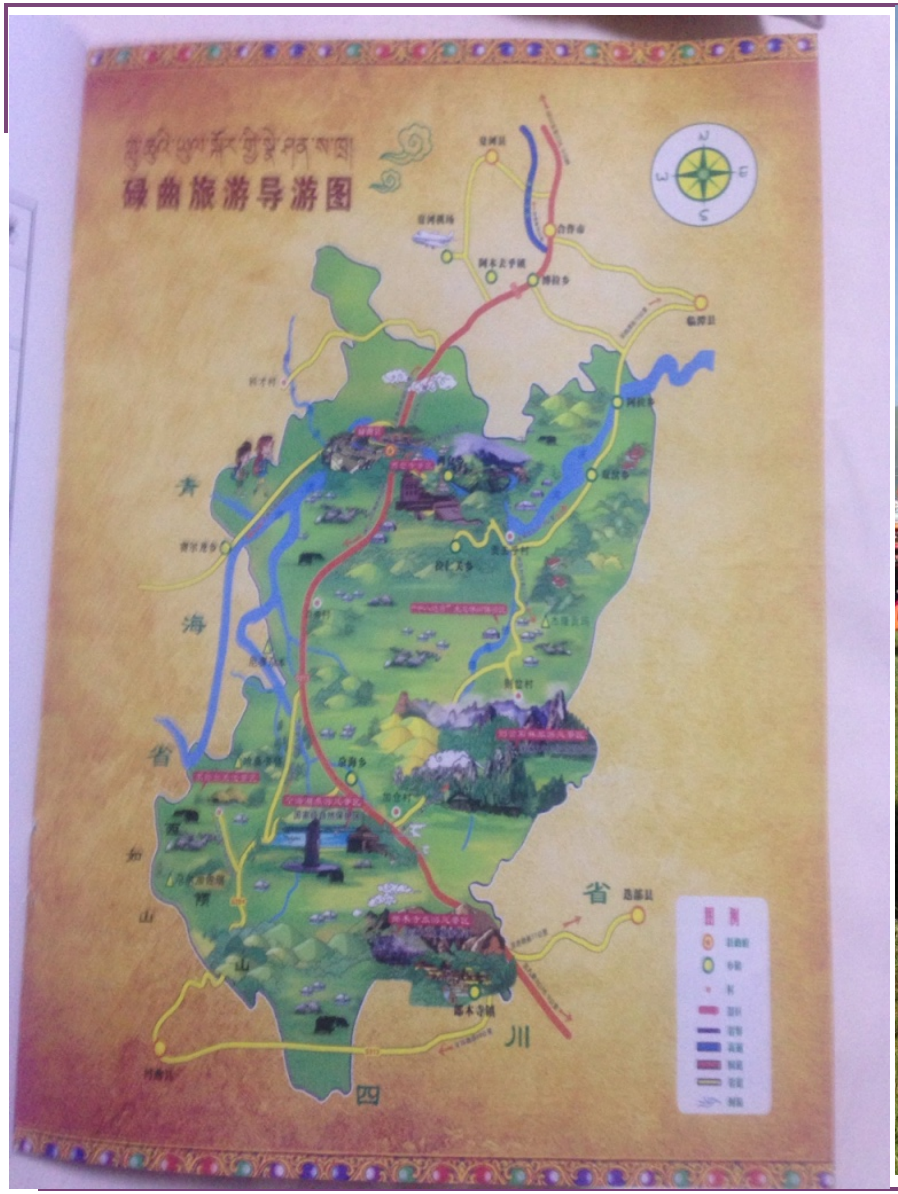








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西仓乡代表队
阿拉乡代表队
卫生代表队













Tibetan Dance Conference






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Real-Life Impact

- This project provides people who are interested in Tibetan culture a chance to dive into the world of cultural heritage through the lens of dance.
- It can benefit both students and scholars in the fields of dance studies, performance studies, cultural studies, Tibetan studies and Chinese studies.

Library Partnership

- I have been working closely with Dr. Fu Liangyu since the Fall semester of 2014 when I first have the idea of doing this project. She provides me not only the knowledge of how to use our online searching tools to collect research materials but also teach me how to design my own research trip to China.
- After returning from my research trip from China, I realize I still need some related materials in Chinese. Therefore, Dr. Fu and Asia Library provide me excellent opportunity to get some precious books to help me to finish my thesis.

Further Work

- Further explore the transnational cultural shift by studying Tibetan dance artists such as Techung and his students in the United States and how ideologies of authenticity shape his Tibetan dance instruction in Emory University.
- Develop a template of examining cultural heritage through dance studies.

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Visual Materials

- *Reba from Grassland* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FInihd87Bd4

Acknowledgements

Faculty Member Support

- Professor Erik Mueggler, Professor Emily Wilcox, Professor Kelly Askew, Professor Pär Cassel, Professor David Rolston, Professor Mary Gallagher, Professor Amy Stillman, Professor Mbala Nkanga, Professor Kwasi Ampene and Professor Liangyu Fu.

Funding Support

- U-M Library- Student Mini-Grants $1,000
- Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies- Summer Research Funding $5,000
- The Center for World Performance Studies- Summer Research Funding $3,500
- Rackham Graduate School- Rackham Graduate Student Research Grant $1,500

Sponsorship

- This project is sponsored by a 2015-2016 mini-grant awarded through the University Library's Student Engagement Program. As part of the mini-grant, I was paired with Liangyu http://www.lib.umich.edu/users/liangyuf

Thank you !