

Leaders, names and festivals: the management of tradition in the Mongolian-Tibetan borderlands

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Who organizes a festival or a ritual or a collective undertaking? Who manages tradition? Often, in Tibetan areas, an event is said to have been organized by the *dmangs tshogs*, or by the government on behalf of the *dmangs tshogs*. This term, which can be translated literally as “the assembled multitude”, or “the masses”, is often used to indicate the community in its broadest sense. Sometimes it indicates the civil community in contrast to the government, sometimes the local community including its leaders, and sometimes simply an unstructured collectivity.

This paper will focus on cadres and the organisational aspect of certain festivals and rituals in a rural area of Qinghai after 1980. It looks firstly at the extent to which the modern *xiang*-s reproduce pre-existing administrative settings, as recorded in party documents from the period 1952–54, and goes on to contrast the organisation of two closely related collective events, the *naadam* and the *Tsendiri latse*, that were first re-celebrated in 1984. They involve what appears to be the same community but have different management, time reckoning systems, religious implications and representations of ethnicity. This offers a glimpse into the the practical task of managing and arranging the re-invention of traditions, and at the same time offers a example of the multifaceted role of political leaders at the local level.

The paper is based on research into the community or communities of ‘Sogpo’, a Mongolian enclave in Qinghai, also called Henan. The area is surrounded by Tibetan communities. Due to the complex ethnic structure of this area, the dilemmas and strategic choices involved in the management of cultural life seem more visible here than elsewhere. The paper suggests that the closer one looks at social and cultural processes of this kind, the more an agency usually located in terms such as “the state”, “the government” or “the community” seems to dissolve into a multitude of individual actions and choices that involve a variety of interpretative communities.