

## Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

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# Old roots, new rhythms

Blending ancient aesthetics with contemporary ideas, young artists and designers are redefining how Tibetan culture is lived, worn, and performed today.

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On a busy afternoon near Barkhor Street in Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region, young people line up outside Nerhi, posing for photos in front of the shop's distinctive facade. Inside is a fashion brand founded by Nyema Droma, known for reimagining Tibetan style for a new generation.

Thousands of kilometers away in Beijing, as evening falls, Tenzin Yeshe and his band, Dora, have just finished a set at the live house DDC. Their music blends traditional Tibetan folk with global influences.

Though they work in different fields, those two young natives of Lhasa are both changing how Tibetan culture is seen and experienced today.

Nyema Droma studied fashion photography and styling at the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London. Yet her time abroad has not distanced her from her roots — if anything, it has brought her closer.

"Traditional Tibetan elements possess a timeless elegance, representing an aesthetic refined over time," she said. "The vibrant colors of Tibetan clothing, for example, harmonize with the plateau's blue skies, white clouds, and green grasslands, while their design is deeply suited to the local way of life."

Beyond her own experience, she has also observed a positive shift among young people in Xizang: as they engage more with global trends, many are developing a stronger appreciation for their own heritage.

"There is no need to follow Paris Fashion Week or chase global color trends," she said. "We should look inward — explore

our traditions and bring them back to life."

Her brand, Nerhi, revitalizes traditional Tibetan garments in two important ways. First, it updates materials by replacing fur and silk with more practical fabrics such as canvas and denim. Second, it simplifies how the garments are worn: unlike older designs that often required assistance, Nerhi pieces are tailored for easy, independent wear.

Nerhi has also been working to update ancient motifs. "Many century-old Tibetan designs are now locked away in museums," Nyema Droma said. "We digitize these patterns and reinterpret them with fresh color palettes to suit contemporary tastes."

For Nyema Droma, however, clothing is just the beginning.

"Revenue from the store allows us to fund a variety of meaningful cultural initiatives," she explained.

One example is the revival of *linka* gatherings. In Tibetan, *linka* refers to a garden or outdoor leisure space. Each summer, Nerhi hosts an event called Nerhi Linka, where Tibetan attire is encouraged as the dress code. As traditional clothing is now mostly only worn during festivals or New Year celebrations, Nyema Droma hopes the event will inspire young people to embrace Tibetan garments more often in everyday life.

"Ten years ago, Xizang had very few cultural events, and young people had limited access to diverse trends," she recalled. "We want to change that by introducing local youth to different styles of music, visual art, and creative expression, and by building a vibrant hub for cultural exchange."

Today, Nerhi Linka has grown into a comprehensive festival featuring live music, markets, exhibitions, and interactive experiences.



**Top:** Tenzin Yeshe (first from left) poses with his band, Dora, while performing in Nyingchi, Xizang autonomous region, in 2023.  
**Above:** Nyema Droma interacts with a local Tibetan elder during a *linka* gathering hosted by Nerhi in Lhasa in August 2025. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Beyond that, Nerhi produces film series, hosts photography contests, and runs media campaigns. It also partners with local artisans to create handmade products — such as yak wool hats, stuffed toys, and Tibetan carpets — helping to revive traditional crafts while boosting artisans' incomes.

"Our business model is not about exploiting ethnic culture or using it superficially," Nyema Droma said. "By generat-

ing revenue through commerce and reinvesting it into our community and culture, we ensure that more people benefit from the brand."

"Nerhi does not belong to one person or one team," she added. "It belongs to all of Xizang, to everyone who cares about it."

## Artistic evolution

Tenzin Yeshe also takes great pride in ethnic art, describing Tibetan aesthetics as both "profound and elegant".

"'Profound' comes from its roots in millennia of heritage, while 'elegant' reflects a refined sensitivity to the viewer and a deep respect for civilization," he explained. "This noble spirit can be seen in everything — from the color palettes of thangka paintings to the costumes, makeup, and props of Tibetan Opera, as well as the expressive body language in musical performances."

Rather than simply drawing from ethnic culture, Tenzin Yeshe actively contributes to it in his own way — most notably through his "New Concept Dra-Nyan 2.0" project.

The *dra-nyan*, an iconic plucked string instrument from Xizang, has certain limitations that he encountered firsthand. "During a major performance with the China National Traditional Orchestra, I realized the *dra-nyan* couldn't reach some of the notes in the score. At that moment, I knew the instrument needed to be improved," he recalled.

Working closely with skilled craftsmen, he applied advanced lutherie techniques to preserve the *dra-nyan*'s classic tone and appearance while expanding its musical range.

He later introduced the upgraded instrument through his band, Dora — named after the Tibetan word for "stage".

"All of our original pieces are rooted in traditional Tibetan music, incorporating elements like Guozhuang dance and Tibetan Opera," Tenzin Yeshe said.

His innovations grew out of a deep, lived understanding of Tibetan Opera. He is both a performer with a renowned Lhasa Tibetan Opera troupe and a doctoral candidate at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, where his thesis focuses on the physical language and body movements of Tibetan Opera.

"Nearly 90 percent of Tibetan Opera research centers on texts, with little attention paid to live performance. But if we want real insights, we must learn through performing," said Tenzin Yeshe.

In his shows, Tenzin Yeshe aims to make Tibetan Opera more contemporary and appealing to young people.

Observing similarities between ancient Greek drama and Tibetan Opera — such as the use of choruses and circular staging — he created an avant-garde adaptation of *Oedipus Rex*. In this piece, he localizes the story and characters while integrating modern stage design and lighting. He plans to present this experimental production at theater festivals and then in small independent venues.

To further engage younger audiences, he has also developed a children's play that explores themes of environmental protection and the metaverse, using this ancient art form to address contemporary issues.

Despite these achievements, Tenzin Yeshe still feels an urgent need to continue growing and evolving.

"For young inheritors of ethnic cultures, a deep love and an open mind are essential," he said. "Whether it's Tibetan Opera or any other art form, we must keep listening, observing, and learning."

## Shining Wisdom

# Barbados experience highlights China's governance vision

I still remember the moment I stepped onto the Peace Ark.

In November 2015, the Chinese hospital ship docked in Barbados, offering free medical services to the public. Curious, I went aboard. Inside, I saw doctors and nurses working steadily, treating patients one after another. When it was my turn, I received a checkup — and found myself wondering, almost in disbelief: is this really free? Could a nation be this generous?

That experience reminded me of a passage from *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*. In the first volume, President Xi writes: "We will concentrate both on China's development and on our responsibilities and contributions to the world as a whole. We will bring benefits to both the Chinese people and the people of the rest of the world."

The Peace Ark was that commitment made real.

This spirit extended beyond healthcare to cultural exchange. One of the most memorable examples was the Fish and Dragon Festival — an event that blended the Chinese dragon with Barbados' national symbol, the flying fish, as part of the Spring Festival celebrations. With the support of the Chinese Ambassador, the festival has been a permanent fixture on our cultural calendar.

For me, the festival brought another idea from the book to life.

In a speech titled "Forge A Stronger Partnership Between China and Latin America and the Caribbean", President Xi emphasizes the importance of inter-civilizational dialogue and cultural exchanges: "One should value not only one's own culture, but also the cultures of others, and this will contribute to the flourishing of all cultures."

The Fish and Dragon Festival was this philosophy in vibrant color. I remember one evening during the festival especially clear-

ly. After a Barbadian singer performed the Chinese folk song *Jasmine Flower*, a Chinese military band took the stage and began playing one of Barbados' most beloved songs, written by one of our cultural icons — and they played it with genuine joy.

In that moment, I realized that this effort to foster mutual understanding wasn't just symbolic; it was heartfelt.

As President Xi writes, "Civilizations become richer and more colorful through exchanges and mutual learning." What I witnessed felt like that idea in motion.

Much of diplomacy happens behind closed doors. But in my experience, China's engagement is also visible in everyday life. On a visit to my old high school, I noticed newly installed computers in a classroom.



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On the side of each CPU was a single Chinese character: *yuan*, which means "to lend a helping hand".

Later, I came across a speech where President Xi spoke about working "hand in hand" with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to pursue development and prosperity. Seeing that character on the computers gave those words a concrete meaning. It was a small detail, but one that connected policy to lived experience.

For me, reading *The Governance of China* is one thing; seeing its principles reflected in real life is another. What I've observed is not just a set of ideas, but a tangible plan unfolding with remarkable speed and sincerity — one that is becoming clear within a single generation.

Recently, I joined an association in Beijing dedicated to promoting friendship between Barbados and China, where people document and share their experiences with audi-

ences back home. I've come to realize that it's now up to those of us living in China — who have witnessed these changes firsthand — to share our stories. We need to encourage others to look more closely, engage more openly, and form their own understanding of China.

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