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Nevertheless, when I observe Makye Ame as if I were a customer, I also find a lot of mysteries, concerning culture, art, religion, folk customs, history, and even with the waiters and waitresses.

When they go onto the stage to perform, the waiters and waitress can so impress the customers with their graceful dancing and enchanting songs that one can hardly believe they were the same people who had just served the food. Many customers order breakfasts also for our waiters and waitresses, to express their fondness. Yet, the fact is, these young women and men were not rigorously selected. They came to work here from rural areas in Tibetan-populated regions after hearing about the restaurant. They all enjoy singing and dancing, especially with friends from over the world. Some of them are thought to be exquisitely handsome, whereas others are more average-looking. However, when performing, they all appear so splendid, their faces lit up with smiles.

It is an undeniable fact that Makye Ame has introduced many enigmas to its customers, as they are constantly posing

questions. We can only solve the puzzles involving Tibetan culture by revisiting our history.

In this book I try to answer my customers' questions as best I can, just as I will greet them with a length of *bada* (pieces of white silk used as gifts to greet friends), prepare a pot of buttered tea for them, and fill their cups with Tibetan *qingke* barley wine. That is not only because I am the general manager of the restaurant, as well as its most senior waiter, but also from the love of Tibetan culture deeply implanted in my heart.









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UNRAVELING THE MYSTERIES



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MAKYE AME





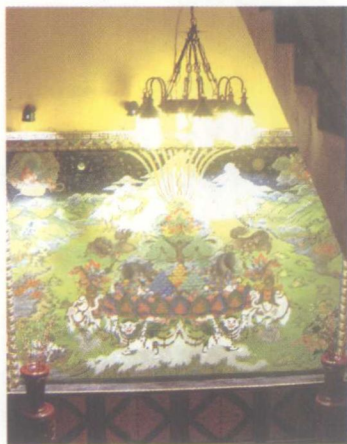
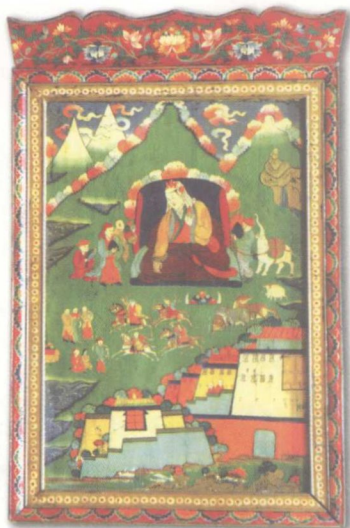
Memories of bygone times can be preserved in certain ways. Take Tibetan utensils, for example. They have been part of the Tibetan people's daily life over the years and witnessed the ups and downs of Tibetan society. In a sense, they are silent witnesses of history. As soon as you enter a Makye Ame restaurant, you will be immersed in the ancient Tibetan culture, as if you were journeying deep into the past.

Even as you take step into the doorway of the Makye Ame Shangri-la Tibetan Restaurant, you can catch faint whiffs of the Tibetan way of life.

Enter the main dining hall, and you will discover revelations everywhere. A huge copper prayer wheel rattles as it is turned, conveying the ancient Tibetan faith. The ceiling is covered with colorful drawings done by Tibetan artists, brimming with religious eloquence yet romance.

In the hall, you can see exquisite Shambhala murals, impressive horns, exorcist masks, century-old official gowns, great Thangka painting scrolls, a handcrafted bar, carved wooden cabinets, and numerous fancy implements, such as lambskin lamps and handmade pottery ware. Waiters and waitresses dressed in colorful Tibetan costumes are busily going to and fro, yet may suddenly start singing or dancing at any time.

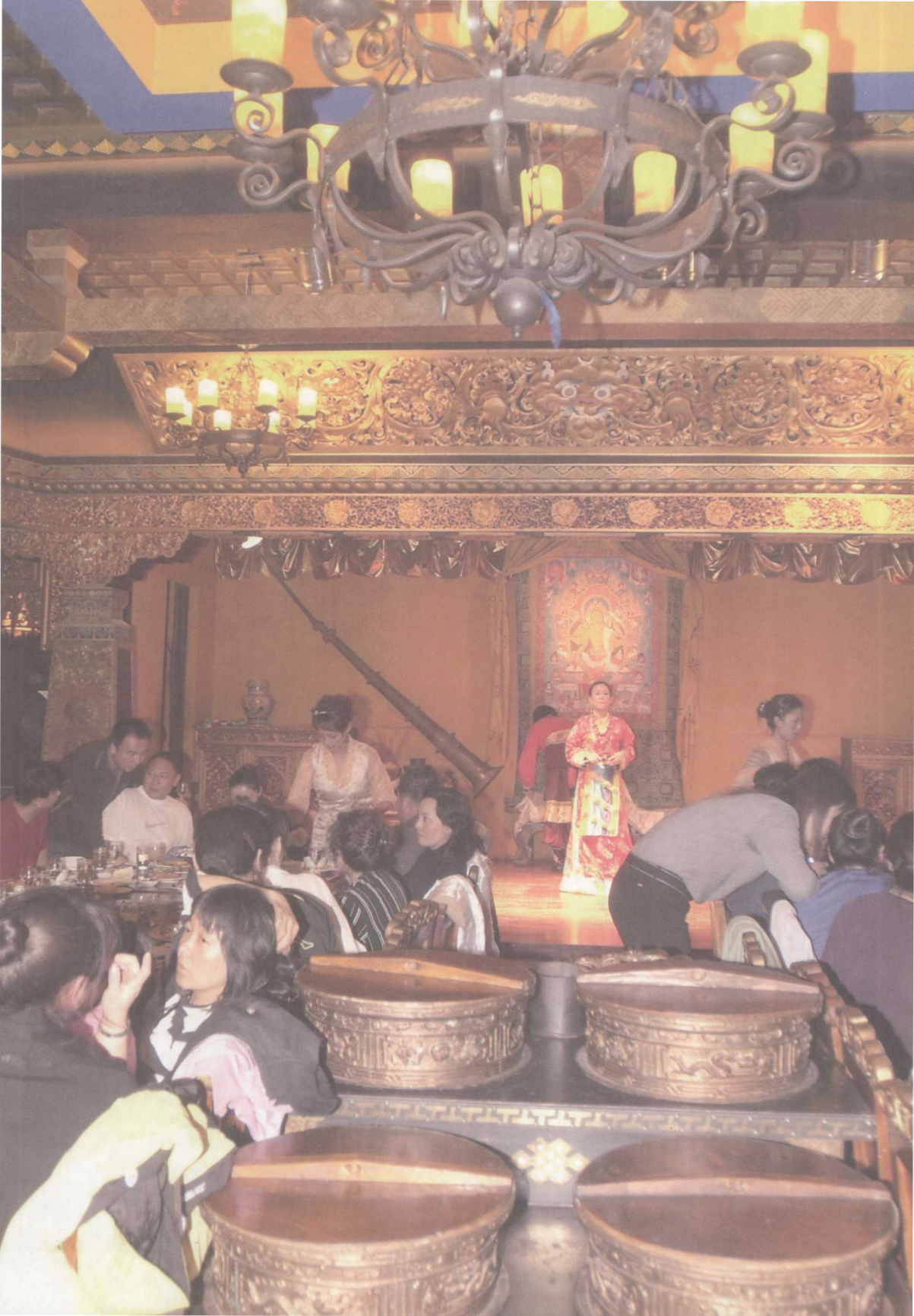
Many customers feel that admiring the decorations in the restaurant is almost as enjoyable as the dining itself. In their view, even a simple utensil can provide evidence of a unique lifestyle. I am fully aware that the lifestyle they express such appreciation for belongs to our ancestors, who possessed courage and passion and valued all aspects of life. More importantly, it has been passed down to this day.



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1. Tibetan paintings cover a wide range of themes, including religion, folk customs and history.
2. A Tibetan landscape mural at Makye Ane.







Who Is Makye Ame: A Maiden, a Mother, a Lover or a Dream?

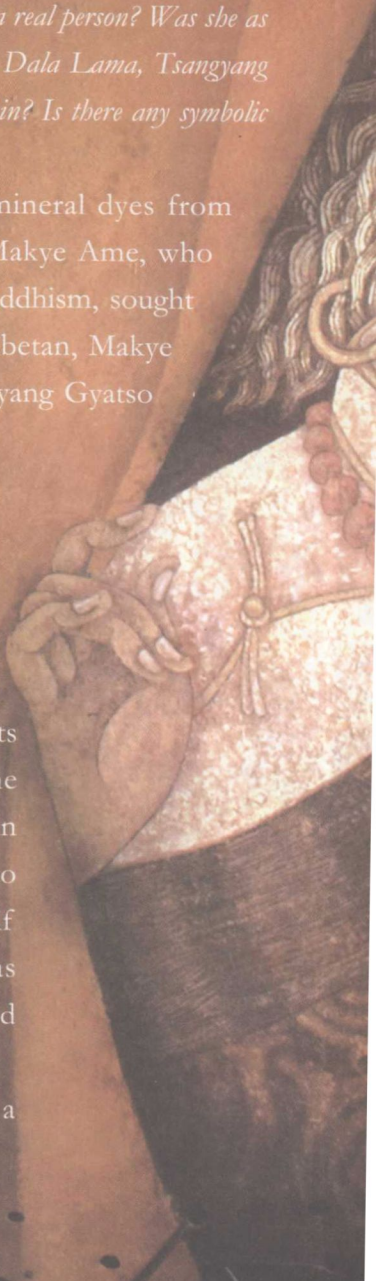
Many customers stop to gaze at Makye Ame painted on a yak-skin on the walls of the staircase room. As they marvel at the lovely portrait, a series of questions usually arises: *Who is she? Was she a real person? Was she as beautiful as legend claims? Was she the lover of the Sixth Dala Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso? Why is she portrayed on an entire piece of yak-skin? Is there any symbolic meaning?*

In this yak-skin painting, with colors from mineral dyes from Tibetan-inhabited areas, the fine-looking girl is Makye Ame, who is said to be the Goddess of Mercy in Tibetan Buddhism, sought by the Sixth Dala Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso. In Tibetan, Makye Ame means “a mother as pure as a virgin.” Tsangyang Gyatso chanted:

*When the bright moon rises
Over the towering mountains to the east,
Makye Ame, with her enchanting smile,
Will come into my heart.*

The legend regarding Tsangyang Gyatso depicts Makye Ame as a mysterious, romantic ideal. The small yellow building in well-known Barkor Street in Lhasa was the very place where Tsangyang Gyatso once lived. Some say that there he submersed himself in composing poetry, while others claim that was where he came across a girl as fair as the moon and wrote that beautiful poem.

Is Makye Ame a maiden, a mother, a lover or a





dream? The answer is a mystery, I think.

Nobody in the secular world can know Tsangyang Gyatso's actual thoughts. A Tibetan author commented that his great love poem is actually an interpretation of Buddhism from another perspective, rather than being a representation of a secular love affair.

For generations upon generations of Tibetans who have lived on the snow-covered plateau, legends and dreams have always been intertwined with reality.

1. A yak-hide painting of Makyé Ane.
2. Savior Mother.