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Abstracts

Contributors to this Issue

Review of *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2:
The Calm before the Storm, 1951-55*,
by Melvyn C. Goldstein

Matthew Akester

Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2: The Calm before the Storm, 1951-55*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. 674 pp., \$43.20 hard.

Eighteen years have elapsed since the publication of the landmark introductory volume of Melvyn Goldstein's *History*, a period of intensified political repression and rapid economic and demographic transformation inside Tibet. The long awaited second volume offers no real surprises or revelations, not even the "secret codicil" to the Seventeen-Point Agreement, which is the book's main subject, but does fulfill its promise as a shrewdly researched and minutely detailed chronicle of Sino-Tibetan diplomacy during the early years of Communist rule. Professor Goldstein is an outstanding figure in Modern Tibet studies, whose contributions in the fields of linguistics, anthropology, social science, and history, and standards of informed insight and intellectual rigor command the respect even of those who reject his political outlook and judgement. His *History* is delivered in a very traditional narrative style, focusing on the comings and goings of the political elites, using a combination of official records and literature, memoirs and interviews. Most of the published accounts of this period so far are, perhaps unsurprisingly, concerned with making a case, either in justification or condemnation of the Chinese Communist occupation of Tibet, and Goldstein's work is no exception. Volume 1 (*The Demise of the Lamaist State, 1913-51*) depicted the erstwhile Lha sa government as a decadent feudal regime dominated by a debauched elite of aristocrats and clergy stubbornly resistant to reform and modernization, and hopelessly out of touch with mid-twentieth-century geo-political reality. Volume 2 advances the thesis that the incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China after 1950 was not only inevitable but was a desirable process of long overdue reform, given the enlightened and liberal "Nationality" policy favored by the Communist leadership at that time. Goldstein therefore accepts the Communists' central claim that Tibet was "liberated" (rather than invaded) by the Red Army,

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and indeed uses the term normatively on several occasions in the text (for example 55, 88, 246, 271). Specifically, the view of events presented in this book is recognizably that of the “Old Tibet Hands” (*Lao Xizang Ren; bod skyod rnying pa*), the progressive cadres of the eighteenth Army who pioneered the soft introduction of Communist rule in Tibet in this period, drawing particularly on the experience of ’Ba’ pa phun tshogs dbang rgyal (b. 1922), whose “autobiography” was co-authored and published by Goldstein in 2004. Phun tshogs dbang rgyal and others like him were of course purged during successive *Maoist* “cleansing” campaigns after 1957, but that is not the subject of this volume, which celebrates their finest hour.

The introduction briefly revisits the vilification of the “old society” familiar from Goldstein’s earlier work with an informative and relatively restrained summary of the political and social system in early twentieth-century Tibet. While one accepts that this is not the main focus of the present volume, the picture presented here does fall noticeably short of even-handedness. The author informs us that he is content to use the term “serf” (12, as favored in Communist propaganda) to cover the various strata of ordinary subjects, rather than the relevant Tibetan terms (and all that they reveal about the peculiar character of Tibetan “manorialism”), despite acknowledging that “being a serf...did not necessarily mean poverty. Many taxpayer [i.e., *khral pa*] families were actually wealthy and had their own servants” (13). It is emphasized, correctly, that ordinary subjects were excluded from politics and that “public opposition to the government or its policies was not permitted” (314, albeit with no admission of irony, given the Communist record in this regard), but the author offers no more convincing explanation for the absence of popular discontent in traditional society than the Communist doctrine that “serfs” were blinded to class exploitation by the opium of religion. In one of the concessionary paragraphs designed to nuance the overall picture, however, we are told that “rural life at the ground level was...characterized by considerable flexibility....Beyond extracting the full measure of corvée labor and fees from their serfs, [lords] were unconcerned with exercising control over the other aspects of their lives” (12), and with these few words, the “extreme darkness” of feudal Tibet pales considerably by comparison with the *Maoist* tyranny introduced in 1956-59.

The problem with this depiction of the old order is not so much the factual presentation (which counts as one of Goldstein’s contributions to Tibetan sociology) as the employment of curious anecdotal material to infer that pre-Communist society was pathologically backward, cruel, superstitious, and depraved. At one point, the reader is informed that an attempt to open a government-run English school in Lha sa in 1946 “was stopped by the Three Big Monasteries, whose fighting *dobdo* monks threatened to kidnap and rape the boy students” (51). Goldstein does not actually suggest that such attitudes were at all representative of Tibetan society at large, but neither is he shy of flirting with the grotesque distortions of Chinese Communist propaganda in encouraging the reader to envisage the “old society” as a repugnant anachronism crying out for secular, modern reform. Tibetan accounts often point out that the tutors employed by noble families taught

the children of the servants alongside the children of the master, whereas the children of “class enemies” were excluded from schooling altogether, such as it was, during fifteen years or more of *Maoist* rule. One could go on, but in short, to condemn the backwardness of Old Tibet and the foolish intransigence of members of the elite is one thing, but to present this as a justification for the Communist “liberation” is quite another.

The obvious strength of the book is its painstaking coverage of the diplomatic and political maneuvering of concerned parties during the 1950-51 occupation, based on official PRC literature and US and UK archival sources, supplemented by the author’s impressive and valuable body of interviews with Tibetan participants, and command of the published sources in Chinese, Tibetan, and English. This makes for an illuminating exposition of the preparation for and conduct of the negotiation of the Seventeen-Point Agreement within the Chinese and Tibetan governments, the progress of Tibetan appeals to the UN and attempted interventions by the US. The latter topic receives particular attention, due to the wealth of available material and the vindication it provides for some of Goldstein’s contentions, such as the validity of PRC concerns over Western imperialist meddling in Tibet, and the willingness of certain members of the Tibetan elite to conspire with the US against Sino-Tibetan rapprochement. The detailed chronicling of the emerging tensions between the Northwest and Southwest military leaderships, culminating in the 1952 Tibet Work Conference, and parallel developments in relations between the Lha sa government and the exiled Pan chen bla ma faction (Chapters 1, 10, 14, and 16), is another notable contribution. Excellent use is made of available sources to deepen understanding of some key players and predicaments in this drama.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that such a rhetorical tone has crept into the text, rather than allowing the research to speak for itself. The narrative survey of key events in this period often reads like a smug and somewhat contemptuous rebuttal of common Tibetan interpretations: the Seventeen-Point Agreement was not (technically) signed under duress (107), the grain shortage precipitated by the arrival of thousands of Chinese troops in Lha sa 1951-2, and consequent inflation and popular resentment, was artificial (252), the People’s Association which articulated this popular resentment did not represent “the people” (319), and so on. The earnest altruism of the PLA and central government was blocked at every turn by the stubborn, reactionary refusal of the traditional elite to relinquish its hold on power. The Chinese exercised exemplary patience and restraint (for example 251, 307, 369), even when childish Tibetans “continued actively to harass them” (345), not realizing that their very liberty to do so was the kind gift of Chairman Mao’s “gradualist” policy (219).

One rather wishes that Professor Goldstein himself had observed such disciplined forbearance in his assessment of these matters, given that his book aspires to the dignity of a historical treatise. Certainly the prose is carefully calibrated, but barely conceals an unseemly appetite for praise (especially *Mao* and *Nga phod*) and blame (for example, *Rtsis dpon nram sras gling dpal ’byor ’jigs med* [1907-76], *Srid blon*

klu khang ba tshe dbang rab brtan [1896-1973], Rgyal lo don grub [b. 1929], and the “Triumvirate of the elder brother, the monk official, and the finance minister” [*gcan mkhan rtsis gsum*]). The views of Tibetan leaders who opposed the occupation of their country, and doubted that the terms of the Seventeen-Point Agreement would be honored in the long term, are dismissed as self-serving and reactionary. For example, the late Stag ’tsher rin po che thub bstan ’jigs med nor bu (1922-2008) famously left Kumbum Monastery (*sku ’bum byams pa gling*) in late 1950 having been “pressured by Chinese officials to go to Lha sa and persuade his brother [the young Dalai Lama] to accept peaceful liberation” (55). Instead, he warned the Dalai Lama that the first indications of the nature of Communist “reform” in A mdo confirmed the Tibetans’ worst fears and that local cadres there were already threatening to destroy religion, for which Goldstein accuses him of “lying” to the Chinese government and “exaggerating” to the Dalai Lama. “It is, therefore, hard to assess the significance of Taktse’s report....but clearly this was not the policy of either the Northwest Bureau or the Central Committee” (57).

The significance of Stag ’tsher rin po che’s report may indeed be “hard to assess” if one ignores the testimony of A mdo people themselves, from whom we know that sporadic armed resistance to the Communist invasion by local Tibetans and Muslims was finally crushed only in 1952, by which time those regarded by the Communists as “landowners” and “reactionaries” were being rounded up, “struggled,” and executed at mass meetings, along with ordinary folk who refused to denounce them, and anti-religious propaganda was already being forced on rural populations. By the time the Dalai and Pan chen bla mas reached A mdo in 1955 on their way back from Beijing, the local authorities had embarked upon agricultural collectivization and expropriation of the monasteries in some areas (see, for example, The Legal Inquiry Committee on Tibet of the International Commission of Jurists, *Tibet and the Chinese People’s Republic*, Geneva, 1960; Bstan ’dzin dpal ’bar, *Nga’i pha yul gyi ya nga ba’i lo rgyus* [The Tragedy of My Homeland; Dharamsala: Narthang Publications, 1994]).

Similarly, remarks by members of the first People’s Association doubting Chinese intentions to honor the Seventeen-Point Agreement are described as “highly exaggerated” (317), and a 1952 letter from Rgyal lo don grub to the US secretary of state which warned, “Under this office [the proposed military-administrative committee, predecessor of the PCART] reforms will be forcefully carried out to convert Tibet to communism. The Dalai Lama will be only a figurehead, and the country’s future will end completely and be in darkness” (467), is presented as a melodramatic piece of intrigue designed to hook American sympathy, even though we well know that it took little more than five years for all of these warnings to prove entirely justified.

And if Tibetan fears were “exaggerated,” how about Goldstein’s adoration of Nga phod’s belief that the Seventeen-Point Agreement “gave Tibet a powerful legal framework in which to maneuver within the People’s Republic of China” (219)? The last chapters of the book are a glowing account of the 1954-5 inauguration of the NPC in Beijing, supposedly a triumph for the “gradualist”

policy of Peaceful Liberation because *Mao* made effusive promises that Tibet could reform at its own pace, and the “young and impressionable” Dalai Lama developed an enthusiasm for Socialist ideology and industrialization. But what emerges from this account is that the proposal for immediate formation of a TAR Preparatory Committee was imposed on the Tibetan delegation as a *fait accompli*, hardly an arrangement respectful of the “full autonomy” promised in the Draft Constitution (emphasized by the Dalai Lama in his address to the Congress [494]), nor one devised through any “legal framework,” nor one in which the Tibetans had any room for “maneuver within the People’s Republic of China.”

This rather rude dismissal of Tibetan opinion is somewhat mitigated by the inclusion of some delightful Lha sa street songs critical of the Chinese and of the Tibetan government (the study of which is another of Goldstein’s contributions to Tibetan sociology), but the most typical comic image used by Tibetans to characterize the Peaceful Liberation is notably absent: this is the wet leather hat (*ko zhwa rlon po*), soft and comfortable to put on, but rigid and impossible to remove once dry. Part three of the book begins a narrative of events from the summer of 1952 onwards with the self-satisfied observation that “The dire predictions of the Chinese destroying religious and social institutions had not transpired, and...life was continuing just as it had before the PLA arrived” (399), this only a year after their arrival in Lha sa and more than two years before the completion of the first motor roads from mainland China reduced their dependence on the goodwill of new and reluctant subjects. The reader is apparently supposed to take the sincerity of the Chinese Communist Party for granted, despite the obvious preponderance of indications to the contrary. Only a few months earlier, in April 1952, an “amazing telegram” from Beijing to the Party Committee in Lha sa (which Goldstein presents as evidence of the enlightened restraint of the leadership) anticipated that

During the next one or two years there are two possible situations. One is that our united front policy with the upper class to unify the majority and isolate the minority will work. The Tibetan people will gradually come close to us, so the bad ones and Tibetan troops will not dare to revolt. The other will be that the bad ones will think we are weak and easily bullied, and this will lead the Tibetan army to launch an uprising. We will defend ourselves and fight back. *Either of the above situations will benefit us* (347, my emphasis).

This is as candid a statement as one could expect to find of the Communists’ readiness to impose direct rule on the first suitable pretext once their logistical position was consolidated, which is more or less exactly what “transpired.”

For this reviewer, the main shortcoming of Professor Goldstein’s analysis is its rather ideological adherence to the modern official Chinese definition of “Tibet” as the area of the present “Tibet Autonomous Region.” The fact that the eastern half of the country – most of Khams, and the A mdo, Mgo log, and Tsa’i ’dam regions – was either constituted as “Qinghai province” or annexed to the provinces of Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan under Nationalist and then Communist rule is not

one that can be taken for granted by a serious historian. To describe Eastern Tibet as “Western China” (for example 41, 234), as the Chinese government does, and as sometimes occurs in the international media, is to legitimize the colonial occupation of Tibetan territory. These are regions of geographic, historic, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural Tibet, former semi-independent kingdoms and principalities with no history of administrative integration with China until recently, and even the local People’s Governments of the PRC there were given “Tibetan Autonomous” status, so that Greater Tibet is at least reflected in the present administrative structure. To exclude the eastern half of the country, where most Tibetans live, from any “history of modern Tibet” is problematic, not least because administrative fragmentation was, or should have been, a key issue in the negotiation of Tibet’s status and future following the Communist invasion.

This is an issue that Goldstein seems determined to avoid: it comes up only once, in an October 1951 letter from the Cabinet (of the traditional Tibetan government; *bka’ shag*) to *Zhang Jingwu* (b. 1906) requesting clarification on three points, including “the return to Tibet of the ethnic Tibetan areas east of the Upper *Yangtse* River.” The author notes that this “appears to have been a completely new issue” (224) and discusses it no further. If the question of Greater Tibet was not raised during the negotiation of the Seventeen-Point Agreement or subsequently, except on this one occasion, that surely requires explanation. Was it the case, as some allege, that the Cabinet was prepared to ignore this difficult and far-reaching question in the hope of securing more favorable terms for the central regions under its own administration?

If Goldstein does not consider this matter relevant to the history of Sino-Tibetan relations in the 1950s, his “Tibetan Revolutionary” hero, Phun tshogs dbang rgyal, certainly does. In an outspoken open letter to *Hu Jintao* in 2004, he wrote

This idea of a united TAR or “Greater Tibet” is seen by concerned persons [in the PRC] as something invented by the current generation of Tibetans in exile. This is a total misunderstanding, for it has been there since long ago. Representatives of various factions have had differing views in this regard, but the Tenth Panchen Lama, while inaugurating an aid organization to work in the TAR and other Tibetan areas [in the 1980s], said, “The demand for a united TAR is legitimate, within the law and consistent with the aspirations of the broad Tibetan masses. The issue is about whether the conditions for it to happen are in place or not, but there is no question of it being ‘resignatory and reactionary.’” This point was welcomed by many Tibetan delegates, myself included (reviewer’s translation).

Phun tshogs dbang rgyal reveals that a proposal for a unified Tibetan administrative region was floated by the central government during the 1956 inception of the PCART but soon dropped after Tibet policy took a “leftist” turn, and argues that the “dual strategy” of going ahead with Democratic Reform in eastern Tibet while postponing it in central Tibet was ultimately responsible for the disastrous events of 1959. My point here is simply that the reader could

legitimately expect a *History of Modern Tibet, 1951-55* to provide some account of the 1949-51 occupation of eastern Tibet, the formation of autonomous prefecture and county administrations in these regions, the role and influence of Tibetan leaders from these regions in the Sino-Tibetan negotiations, the implementation of Democratic Reform in some regions before 1955, and so on. And if a proposed Tibet Autonomous Region comprising Greater Tibet really featured in Sino-Tibetan negotiations in this period, I think the reader should be told.

I hope I can speak for all devotees of Tibetan studies in congratulating Professor Goldstein on his latest published work, and anticipating the third volume of his *History*, which is expected to deal with the imposition of Communist terror in Tibet, 1956-59.

Glossary

Note: these glossary entries are organized in Tibetan alphabetical order. All entries list the following information in this order: THL Extended Wylie transliteration of the term, THL Phonetic rendering of the term, the English translation, the Sanskrit equivalent, the Chinese equivalent, other equivalents such as Mongolian or Latin, associated dates, and the type of term.

Ka					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>kan su'u</i>	Kensu		Chi. <i>Gansu</i>		Place
<i>ko zhwa rlon po</i>	Kozha Lönpo	wet leather hat			Term
<i>bka' shag</i>	Kashak	Cabinet (of the traditional Tibetan government)			Organization
<i>sku 'bum byams pa gling</i>	Kumbum Jampa Ling	Kumbum Monastery			Monastery
Kha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>khams</i>	Kham				Place
<i>khral pa</i>	trepa	tax-paying subjects of a landowner in traditional Tibet			Term
Ga					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>mgo log</i>	Golok				Place
<i>'gu log</i>	Gulok				Place
<i>rgyal lo don grub</i>	Gyalo Döndrup			1929-	Person
Nga					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>nga phod</i>	Ngapö				Person
<i>nga phod ngag dbang 'jigs med</i>	Ngapö Ngawang Jikmé			1910-	Person
<i>nga 'i pha yul gyi ya nga ba 'i lo rgyus</i>	<i>Ngé Payülgyi Yangawé Logyü</i>	<i>The Tragedy of my Homeland</i>			Text
Ca					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>gcan mkhan rtsis gsum</i>	chenkhentsi sum	Triumvirate of the elder brother, the monk official, and the finance minister			Term
Ta					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>stag 'tsher rin po che</i>	Taktser Rinpoché				Person
<i>stag 'tsher rin po che thub bstan 'jigs med nor bu</i>	Taktser Rinpoché Tupten Jikmé Norbu			1922-2008	Person
<i>bstan 'dzin dpal 'bar</i>	Tendzin Pelbar				Author

Da					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>bde mkhar ba</i>	Dekharwa				Person
Pa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>pan chen bla ma</i>	Penchen Lama				Person
Pha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>phun tshogs dbang rgyal</i>	Püntsok Wanggyel			1922-	Person
Ba					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>bod skyod rmying pa</i>	Bökyö Nyingpa	Old Tibet Hands	Chi. <i>Lao Xizang Ren</i>		Name generic
<i>'ba' pa phun tshogs dbang rgyal</i>	Bapa Püntsok Wanggyel			1922-	Person
Tsa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>tsa'i 'dam</i>	Tsedam				Place
<i>rtsis dpon rnam sras gling dpal 'byor 'jigs med</i>	Tsipön Namseling Peljor Jikmé			1907-76	Person
Tsha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>mtsho sngon</i>	Tsongön		Chi. <i>Qinghai</i>		Place
Za					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>zi khron</i>	Zitrön		Chi. <i>Sichuan</i>		Place
Ya					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>yul nan</i>	Yülne		Chi. <i>Yunnan</i>		Place
Sa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>srid blon klu khang ba tshe dbang rab brtan</i>	Silön Lukhangwa Tsewang Rapten			1896-1973	Person
Ha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>lha sa</i>	Lhasa				Place
A					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>a mdo</i>	Amdo				Place
Chinese					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Chinese	Dates	Type
			<i>Beijing</i>		Place
			<i>Hu Jintao</i>		Person

			<i>Mao, Mao Zedong</i>	1893-1976	Person
			<i>Zhang Jinwu</i>	1906-	Person