



The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama

Melvyn C. Goldstein

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Tensions over the "Tibet Question"—the political status of Tibet—are escalating every day. The Dalai Lama has gained broad international sympathy in his appeals for autonomy from China, yet the Chinese government maintains a hard-line position against it. What is the history of the conflict? Can the two sides come to an acceptable compromise? In this thoughtful analysis, distinguished professor and longtime Tibet analyst Melvyn C. Goldstein presents a balanced and accessible view of the conflict and a proposal for the future.

Tibet's political fortunes have undergone numerous vicissitudes since the fifth Dalai Lama first ascended to political power in Tibet in 1642. In this century, a forty-year period of de facto independence following the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 ended abruptly when the Chinese Communists forcibly incorporated Tibet into their new state and began the series of changes that destroyed much of Tibet's traditional social, cultural, and economic system. After the death of Mao in 1976, the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping quickly produced a change in attitude in Beijing and a major initiative to negotiate with the Dalai Lama to solve the conflict. This failed. With the death of Deng Xiaoping, the future of Tibet is more uncertain than ever, and Goldstein argues that the conflict could easily erupt into violence.

Drawing upon his deep knowledge of the Tibetan culture and people, Goldstein takes us through the history of Tibet, concentrating on the political and cultural negotiations over the status of Tibet from the turn of the century to the present. He describes the role of Tibet in Chinese politics, the feeble and conflicting responses of foreign governments, overtures and rebuffs on both sides, and the nationalistic emotions that are inextricably entwined in the political debate. Ultimately, he presents a plan for a reasoned compromise, identifying key aspects of the conflict and appealing to the United States to play an active diplomatic role. Clearly written and carefully argued, this book will become the definitive source for anyone seeking an understanding of the Tibet Question during this dangerous turning point in its turbulent history.

The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama Details

Date : Published April 2nd 1999 by University of California Press (first published January 1st 1997)

ISBN : 9780520219519

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Format : Paperback 165 pages

Genre : History, Cultural, China, Nonfiction, Politics, Asia



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From Reader Review The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama for online ebook

rachelm says

I found this to be a concise and useful introduction to Tibetan history and to the complex historical relationship between Tibet and China.

Goldstein has been criticized by both Tibetan and Chinese partisans for his portrayal of the conflict (his decision to not deal at all with human rights issues in Tibet felt problematic to me.)

However, his endeavor to present the context (available information, historical framework, etc.) within which all parties made decisions is incredibly helpful in understanding the situation in modern Tibet, and in thinking about possible solutions.

Highly recommend as a short introduction to Tibetan history, as well as for those interested in "the Tibetan question" today.

Michal Thoma says

Extremely interesting book uncovering the complexity of sino-tibetan relations from the early history of Tibet till recent years. To accuse author of being pro-Chinese is injustice, the book is balanced focusing on explaining the crucial concerns which did lead to the decision of both Tibetan and Chinese players. The true is that while the Chinese are mostly portrayed as behaving somewhat mechanically or even rationally, the Tibetan leadership is often portrayed as naive and inept. This is in fact possibly true picture, though still it can't hardly justify the derogatory language used. My opinion is though, that this is not the expression of bias but more a sincere frustration over the missed opportunities.

Nicole Homan says

I found this to be a good primer on the history between Tibet and China.

The first time I read this book, I was on an airplane flying from Boston to Cleveland. The passenger next to me asked why I was reading the book. The question seemed kind of odd, but it turned out he was traveling to Cleveland to visit his friend, Melvyn Goldstein, the author...a strange bit of synchronicity.

Morgan Garner says

This is a very interesting overview of the Tibetan Problem, illuminating both the perspective of the Dalai Lama, and that of the Peoples Republic of China. Although it tends to take a sympathetic view of the Tibetan people, Goldstein does not stint in declaiming the mistakes of the Dalai Lama, along with those of Tibet's

Communist rulers. Goldstein gives an excellent overview of the history of Tibet...outlining their long history of independence...and concludes with a discussion of the U.S. involvement in Tibet, and what little hope Tibet has for the future. Well, written, interesting, short, and concise.

Kimfu says

"The Snow Lion and the Dragon" was Book No. 7 for 2013!

Karen says

This book is somewhat dated (1997), but I found the information interesting, considering I really knew very little about Tibet before reading this book. Goldstein gives a concise history of the Tibet and China relationship which is very complex. He lays out the arguments, with documents from both sides, how the US has exacerbated problems rather than making things better for the Tibetans, and what is possible for the future.

Missie Kay says

Goldstein has clearly studied the situation between China and Tibet to an extent that few Westerners have. His treatment of the history is clear and concise, not glossing over mistakes made on either side. As for his solution, it would work, if any of the parties involved would agree, but this seems doubtful.

Michael Connolly says

Tibet is a sparsely populated region on a high plateau north of the Himalayas. In fact, for thousands of years, many Tibetans have lived in areas that are now provinces of China: Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan provinces. The Chinese province of Tibet is the largest part of ethnographic Tibet. For the vast majority of its history, Tibet has been an independent country, separate from China. However, because of its peaceful Buddhist nature, Tibet has never had a strong military, and so has not been able to defend itself. At various times in its long history, it has turned to the Mongols, the Manchus and the British to protect it.

Language:

The people of Tibet speak a language that is not a dialect of Chinese (the language of the majority Han ethnicity of China). The Tibetan language is similar to Burmese, the Dzongkha language of Bhutan, and various minority languages of Yunnan province. Tibetan has a written script imported from northern India.

Religion:

Before Buddhism spread to Tibet, they had a shamanistic Bon religion. All Tibet Buddhist sects are part of the Mahayana school of Buddhism. The current "Yellow Hat" Geluk Buddhist sect was introduced into Tibet in around 1400 by an Amdo monk named Tsongkapa. The Yellow Hat form of Buddhism came to dominate Tibet in the years before Tibet came under Manchu rule. The Dalai Lama is the main leader of the Yellow Hat Buddhists, while the Panchen Lama is a secondary leader.

Mongol Empire:

Tibet was conquered by Genghis Khan, paid him tribute, and became part of the Mongol empire. The Chinese interpreted this as Tibet becoming part of China, but the Tibetans saw themselves as parallel to the Chinese, both parts of the Mongol empire. During Mongol rule, the main Buddhist sects were the Red Hat sects, Sakya and Kargyu. When Tibet was allied with the Mongols, Tibet provided the Mongols with religion, and the Mongols provided the Tibetans with military protection.

Ming Dynasty:

During the ethnic Chinese Ming dynasty, Tibet's relationship with China was one of suzerainty: the Ming dynasty controlled Tibet's foreign affairs, while Tibet had control of its own internal affairs.

Manchu Dynasty:

The Qing (Manchu) Dynasty ruled China from 1720 to 1911. During the Manchu (Ching) Dynasty, Tibet was under the protection of the Manchus. During the late nineteenth century the British, who were in India, established trade relations with Tibet.

Republic of China (1911):

When Sun Yatsen took power in 1911, he saw Tibet as part of China and wanted to expel the British from Tibet. Britain was not willing to fight for Tibet. Britain did make Bhutan and Sikkim into Indian protectorates. The British made a part of Tibet near Bhutan into the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. Mongolia was able to become an independent country after World War II due to the support of Joseph Stalin.

People's Republic of China (1949):

In 1950 the Chinese People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet and conquered the Tibetan army at Chamdo. Little blood was shed before Tibet surrendered. Tibet turned to the United Nations for help in preserving its autonomy from China, but the United Nations refused to support Tibet, due to the opposition of Britain and India. Between 1951 and 1959 China left Tibet alone to run its own affairs. In 1959 the C.I.A. supported a rebellion for independence in Tibet, but it failed. The C.I.A. continued to support the Tibetan rebels in their base in Nepal. The Chinese communists claimed that they were trying to liberate Tibet from feudalism and serfdom. They outlawed Buddhism and collectivized agriculture. The Tibetan were allowed to keep their language, however.

During the late 1960s the United States abandoned its support for Tibet, because it wanted to improve relations with the PRC.

Sinicization:

Until the twentieth century, no Chinese people lived in Tibet. Many Han Chinese and Hui Muslims have moved to Tibet since 1984 to work in modernizing the Tibet and building infrastructure. There are now many Han Chinese living in Tibet, but they are regarded as being only temporary workers. The Chinese have become more tolerant of Buddhism since Mao passed away. Their religion is no longer outlawed, as it was during the Mao years. The PRC one-child rule is less strictly enforced in Tibet.

Independence Movement:

The Dalai Lama and the exiled Tibetan government live in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. In 1989 the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize. The rulers of China do not want Tibet, the Uyghur Turkic Muslim people, Taiwan or Hong Kong to be independent. Many Tibetans would settle for what Hong Kong currently has: one country two systems. But the Chinese rulers don't want them to have that. The United States Congress has made efforts during the past 25 years to give greater recognition to Tibet. The author believes that it is unrealistic to believe that the PRC will ever allow Tibet to become a separate country.

Brandon says

If found this book quite interesting considering my knowledge of Tibet is less than moderate. However, I didn't like the way the author ended the book. It came to an abrupt end. I also disagree with his stance that Tibet should negotiate with the Chinese if both sides are to live 'harmoniously'. Considering all the Tibet has relinquished or lost due to being overpowered or unsupported, I find no need to.... Well, I don't want to spoil anything for those who haven't read this book. With that being said, I think it's a good installment into a brief history of Tibet.

Zayden says

I had heard a lot about Melvyn Goldstein before reading anything by him. Seeing for myself, its pretty clear that he doesn't like Tibetans. The facts and dates and data in this book are very precise which I liked, but there were passages in which he unnecessarily insults Tibetans. Using words like "inept" and almost arguing a "they-were-asking-for-it" rationalization for Chinese occupation, I believe, are uncalled for.

Will Dewey says

A decent introduction, but maybe a bit too pro-Chinese (at least in tone)

McKinley says

Political history of area. Starts with brief overview of earlier history including Mongolian warring. A bit about English intervention in late 1800s as that leads into the last 120 years with China. Dry reading for a very complex issue.

Kathy says

Useful overview of the political situation in Tibet and relations with China over the last couple centuries, focusing on recent interaction with communist China. The book came out 10 years ago, so it would be interesting to read an update of the situation, to see what the author's take is on it now. I got the feeling, however, that the author hasn't had any first-hand experience with Tibetan Buddhist practice (nor does he seem to have much interest or see its relevance). In my very inexpert opinion, I don't think you can understand Tibet without this piece.
