

## BOOK REVIEWS

# The Making of Modern Tibet

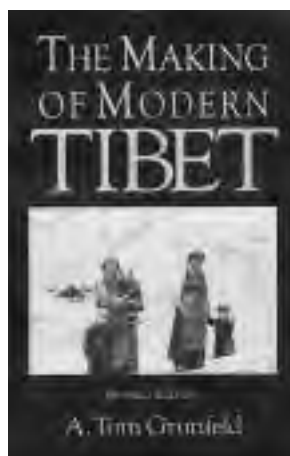
(Revised Edition)

By A. Tom Grunfeld

ARMONK, NEW YORK, LONDON, ENGLAND: M. E. SHARPE, 1996  
247 PAGES + APPENDICES

For those who like their enemies pure and their heroes appropriately sainted, A. Tom Grunfeld's revised *The Making of Modern Tibet* will probably disappoint. Though Grunfeld has taken on a subject that has been almost completely polarized by the one-sided imagery projected by either the Chinese government or the Tibetan exile community and its many Western supporters, Professor Grunfeld has not chosen sides. Rather, Grunfeld has worked diligently to offer as balanced a treatment as possible, and not surprisingly, one that produces few heroes and perhaps more important, few complete villains.

In fact, Grunfeld, though clearly sympathetic to the plight of the Tibetans and their struggles to maintain their cultural identity, begins with a reality check that does much to counterbalance the image of pre-Chinese Tibet as having been some sort of "Shangri-la," an imagery that is common in the West. To Grunfeld, first and foremost, Tibet before the Chinese invasion was a very real place, not some mythological paradise of religious clarity.



In his first chapter, "Tibet As It Used to Be," he draws a very graphic and a not particularly complimentary overview of Tibet and its historical traditions vis-à-vis women, education, crime, elites and others. He makes it clear that pre-1950 Tibet—despite the claims of some of its loudest apologists, was a "highly stratified society" where a powerful elite, who not infrequently sent its children to be educated in India, ruled over the majority of the people who lived as serfs. Grunfeld summarizes pre-1950 Tibet quite succinctly when he writes, "The evidence indicates that Tibet, as of 1950, was neither a mythical 'Shangri-la' nor a 'hell on earth.' Tibetans led a difficult and harsh existence in which some benefited more than others. Tibet was a medieval society that somehow survived into the second half of the twentieth century" (p. 33).

One aspect of the book that this reader found particularly helpful was the emphasis on the complicated historical relationship between the various Panchen Lamas and the many successive Dalai Lamas. That they were often at odds and not infrequently have approached their relationship with Beijing quite differently is of particular interest. Especially helpful is Grunfeld's decision to add two appendices, one on the population of Tibet and the other on independence, which look much more closely at these important and controversial issues.

Of course, Grunfeld's work is not without its problems. Because the book is a revised second edition, the latter sections are somewhat problematic. The last two chapters are entitled "The Current Situation" and "The Last Decade 1985–1995" respectively. Though I don't have a copy of the first edition at hand, one guesses that "The Current Situation" was probably the last chapter of the earlier edition and that "The Last Decade 1985–1995" was later added. The situation is thus somewhat confusing.

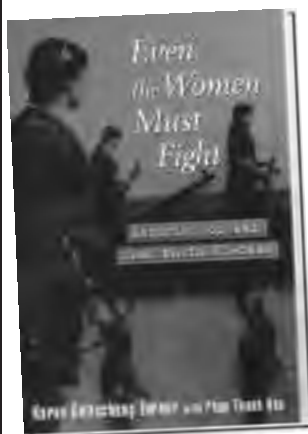
Clearly the material in the two chapters would have been much more helpful if they had been reorganized into one or perhaps two additional thematic chapters, one perhaps on Tibet through the 1980s and the other on more recent developments. One hesitates, though, to criticize Grunfeld when all of us who have worked with publishers, and especially on revisions of already published works, know how reticent publishers can be to revamp already prepared material when simply adding a postscript often seems enough.

But enough of such concerns; overall, the book does a wonderful job of introducing the general reader and student alike to the rise of modern Tibet. It is quite readable and at 247 pages, long enough to be detailed without being overwhelming. I recommend it highly. ■

Steven A. Leibo

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