

The Snow Lion and the Dragon

China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama

By Melvyn C. Goldstein

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This volume, in spite of its brevity, will be welcomed by anyone curious about the “Tibet Question,” its history, and prospects for its resolution. Melvyn Goldstein, Director of Case Western Reserve University’s Center for Research on Tibet, is one of the West’s ablest students of Tibet. In *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* he presents a fair and balanced explanation of those factors that have contributed to the present crisis in Chinese-Tibetan relations as well as some serious suggestions for a melioration of tensions.

Neither the principals involved in the crisis nor their ardent propagandists are likely to be pleased by this book which offers history rather than ideology and honest possibilities rather than nostalgic dreams.

Though Goldstein is an anthropologist with a primary interest in contemporary Tibet, he provides a concise sketch of the history that has led to the present situation. From the seventh century, China and Tibet have maintained political contact. An expansive Tibetan dynasty moved northward and eastward well beyond the borders of “political Tibet” during the Tang dynasty, and formal diplomatic relations were established between the two sovereignties. It was the Mongols who subjugated both China and Tibet providing the basis for later claims by Chinese emperors, by the Nationalists, and now by the People’s Republic, that Tibet is a part of China. It was also the Mongols who intervened to assure the domination of the Yellow Hat sect of the Dalai Lama in “political Tibet.” Subsequently, Tibetans were deeply involved in dynastic struggles among the Mongols, yet Tibetan nationalists insist that the relationship that evolved was with the Mongols and not with the Chinese, since the Mongols were foreign conquerors of both peoples.

Qing emperors exercised extensive control over Tibet and substantially reduced Tibet’s borders to exclude “ethnographic Tibet,” those areas of contemporary China outside “political Tibet” that are home to significant numbers of Tibetans. Only the collapse of the Qing and the emergence of a weak Chinese Republic gave the Tibetans a respite from Chinese control. Once the PRC had defeated the Nationalist armies of Chiang Kai-shek, it turned to establishment of far greater control over Tibet than had been

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exercised by any Chinese ruler for centuries. Thus was precipitated the Tibet Question, a classic nationalistic struggle between the right of an ethnic people to self-determination and the right of a multi-ethnic state to maintain what it regards as its historic territorial integrity.

Such struggles have no happy or easy solutions, as anyone who has thought about post-independence India or contemporary Yugoslavia will be compelled to recognize. Goldstein acknowledges the heavy-handed role of the Chinese in Tibet since 1950 and its very real threat to the survival of Tibetan culture. Yet he also grants the truth of many of the Chinese claims as to their contributions to modernization of Tibet, a modernization certainly desired by most Tibetans. Goldstein also explains the intensification of this issue occasioned by the presence in the Dharamsala “exile” government of Tibetans from ethnographic Tibet, particularly from areas in Sichuan Province to which the Dalai Lama has laid claim and which China could not and would not ever recognize as a part of Tibet. He concludes with some suggestions as to possible resolution of a problem which serves the interests of neither Tibet nor China, and suggestions as to how the United States or other Western nations might encourage resolution.

This monograph could be a wonderful teaching tool in helping faculty and students understand one of the most intractable problems of our day. Too many Americans either know nothing of Tibet or get their information and ideas from Hollywood productions whose creators are masters of cinematography but haven’t a clue as to what the Tibet Question is all about. Goldstein provides a clear explanation of a very complex history and attempts to bring readers into a sympathetic understanding of the cultural and social perspectives of Chinese and Tibetan nationalists. He is a master of summarizing without obfuscating, and he writes so that the nonspecialist learns without becoming overwhelmed by detail. In addition to answering the inevitable questions of cause and history of the Tibet Question, this book would be a fine resource for a student debate on the topic. I can think of no other volume that I would prefer to place in the hands of teachers, college students, and high school students interested in learning about contemporary Tibet. ■

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