The documentation of the book is admirably suited to the kind of readership the author is seeking. He specifies an “anglophone” readership (p. 325), and has therefore emphasized books in English. However, there are also some in other European languages, such as French and German, a few in Chinese, and of course some in Tibetan, published both in Tibet itself and in the exile community in Dharamsala, India, where the Dalai Lama has had his headquarters since shortly after fleeing China as a result of the failure of his March 1959 uprising. The books in the bibliography are listed according to their value for the individual chapters, a practice that makes Kapstein’s book very useful for the non-specialist reader.

Another strength of this book is a large number of pictures, the great majority taken by the author himself. Almost all the pictures were taken within China. They show aspects of contemporary life and times, but there are also quite a few showing images of the past, such as murals or statues in the many monasteries in Tibetan areas.

Overall, this is an excellent book and it adds greatly to our knowledge of this fascinating people. Although not without weaknesses, it is balanced and fair, scholarly without being dense, well documented but still accessible. It is definitely a major contribution to the literature on the Tibetans, one that has fortunately been growing quite rapidly with the expanding interest in Tibet and Tibetan affairs over recent years. I recommend this book strongly to the general reader as well as the specialist.

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When I started to read Melvyn Goldstein’s book about a critical period in the history of modern Tibet I was filled with a sense of trepidation. First, I teach and research in the field of education, and I wondered how, if at all – despite having a personal interest in Buddhism – I would manage to make sense of a text about a specialist area of history that runs to 640 pages. Second, I naively wondered, having read Patrick French’s excellent Tibet, Tibet: A personal history of a lost land (2003) which debunked any romantic notions I had of Tibet as a Shangri-La of the western imagination, if Goldstein’s book might be written from a perspective too sympathetic to the cause of a Tibet that never really existed. In relation to both of these fears I could not have been more wrong. Goldstein has written an immensely erudite and pioneering history of an era in Tibetan history that started with the country in a pre-modern state and ended in 1955 with the possibility that it could develop into a Buddhist-Communist autonomous region of the People’s Republic of China, and one in which national self-determination was a realistic expectation.²

The book begins with a short but important preface in which Goldstein outlines how he, with the help of a team of researchers, made use of a remarkable range of sources to piece together a detailed and balanced historical account. These included: primary materials (government records and documents); oral historical data; restricted circulation publications from China; eyewitness and other witness
accounts, and; newspapers, books and articles. The English transcripts of interviews alone run to over 6000 pages. Many important sources, including those of the Tibet Autonomous Region, the government’s of China and the United States of America, were unavailable to Goldstein, but the material he was able to collate and interpret constitutes the most detailed and comprehensive range of material currently available to students and scholars of Tibetan history. The preface also includes a succinct summary of the book’s overall thesis.

The period [1951–1955] has been viewed simplisticly as a confrontation in which Tibetans faced Chinese Communists in a showdown doomed to fail because the Chinese were intent on destroying Tibet. As with most generalizations, there is some truth to this view, but new primary data have revealed that neither the Chinese nor the Tibetan side was as homogeneous as previously thought. Not only did each side have significant internal factions representing conflicting points of view, but these internal factions allied themselves with factions on the opposite side, creating a far more complex situation than had been previously realized. (p. xii)

It is this complexity that Goldstein explores and interprets, often imaginatively, but always through the presentation of meticulously gathered evidence.

The first two parts of the book discuss the consequences of the notorious “Seventeen-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet”, by the People’s Republic of China, the implementation of which marked the end of any hopes that Tibetans had of existing as an independent nation state. In the first part a particularly interesting account of the changing post-war, post-colonial political landscape is presented. The British government, for example, offered no support to the Tibetan cause, on the grounds that its authority in the region had been yielded to India, and more pragmatically, because it viewed Tibetan resistance – particularly through military means – as futile. The US offered advice and support to Tibet, but this was perceived as inadequate. India too, stood aloof from Tibet in its hour of need, and despite a small amount of evidence to the contrary, it appeared to take the position that it could do little in terms of providing military support and that the only way to proceed was through peaceful negotiation.

In the second part, Goldstein, presents a detailed account of confrontation and adjustment following the occupation of Tibet by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). The first few months of the occupation were made particularly problematic because of food shortages; the Tibetan government did little to secure supplies for the PLA and the Chinese failed to ensure the kind compliance that would have guaranteed the regular availability of foodstuffs. Food prices rocketed and relationships between Tibetans and the incomers from China deteriorated. Tibetan dissent is vividly captured in satirical Lhasa street songs (reported in research interviews), one example of which includes the lyric:

Mao has liberated (us),
(and) butter has become a hundred ngûsang (in price).
Shamelessly,
all material goods have increased (in price). (p. 255)

Two other important themes are explored in this part of the book. First, the rivalry between Tibet’s two most powerful Lamas, the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama reveals high tension at the heart of Tibetan political society. This rivalry was also mirrored in China, where different regional officials held very different views on how to manage and control relations with Tibet’s own fractured leadership. These
difficulties highlight the importance of the region's geography and the vast distance between Beijing and Lhasa. Distance, combined with the complexities of terrain, clearly enabled regional policies and regional leadership to operate, and sometimes these flew in the face of national policy. Goldstein recognizes this and details how Mao Zedong sought to bring his regional mavericks under greater control. The second theme concerns the creation of the Tibetan People's Association. This organization grew rapidly and began to pose a real threat to the Chinese in Tibet. The Chinese and highest Tibet officials (the Kashag) appealed to the Dalai Lama to intervene. This he did, albeit reluctantly, and in response, Mao softened China's policy towards the taking over of the Tibetan army. This intervention from Beijing also ushered in a new phase of Sino-Tibetan relations, and this was characterized by efforts in Beijing to establish a more direct and personal relationship with the Dalai Lama.

The third and final part of the book examines a remarkable period of cooperation and change, during which the Chinese government opened schools in Tibet. Despite resistance within parts of Tibetan society these schools were popular and successful, seemingly because they gave educational opportunities to middle and some lower class Tibetans for the first time. They also symbolized modernization. Two roads from China to Tibet were also built, and opened to military traffic by the end of 1954. The existence of these roads secured food supplies, albeit at the cost of 3000 lives, and stabilized the Chinese presence in the country. From a Chinese perspective, this clearly represented progress, but conflict within the Communist Party in Tibet became a major concern, as one of its factions, led by Fan Ming sought to increase the pace of reform through supporting the Panchen Lama in setting up an autonomous region that would also usurp the authority of the Dalai Lama. Mao Zedong, not without difficulty, restored unity within the Party, making it clear that China backed the Dalai Lama and intended to adopt a gradualist stance to modernizing Tibet and bringing it under the control of the "motherland".

This policy is further explored in a vivid and remarkably detailed account of the Dalai Lama's visit to Beijing in 1954. Here, Goldstein shows great acumen and scholarship in letting key protagonists speak for themselves. The young Tibetan leader was clearly enamoured with what he heard and saw, so much so that he even asked to join the Communist Party. For his part, Mao Zedong revealed his diplomacy, political cunning and psychological understanding of the Dalai Lama. In a meeting held in February 1995 for example, he said to both the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama,

In our country, many places are still very backward, Tibet is very backward, and we should acknowledge it. It is better for us to acknowledge it. We can learn from advanced countries, learn from the USSR. In this way, we are learning from advanced nations and countries, and different nationalities learn from one another within our country. (p. 506)

The emphasis here is on shared journey towards development and the need for China, with Tibet, to learn. In the same meeting he also recognized the importance of gaining the confidence of the Tibetan leaders.

Then you explained to them [political officials in Tibet] and asked for their opinions. This was very good. You are good at getting things done. When we do things at central government, we often get the opinions of the local people. We discuss these with you. So please relax; we will not force you to do anything. (p. 507)

The Dalai Lama – and Mao had made it very clear that he, rather than the Panchen Lama, was the leader of Tibet – was clearly convinced of China’s good intentions.
I was in great spirits ... Mao Zedong himself told me ..., "Since you are poor at this moment, we are helping you, but after twenty years we will withdraw. At that time you must help us." (p. 518)

Goldstein also reveals how Mao cynically espoused the virtues of Buddhism, and in doing so developed even greater empathy with the Dalai Lama.

So you Buddhist followers and we communists work together to save the masses from their suffering. We have a common point here, [although] certainly we have different points. In inland China, there is Guanyin Buddha. Her statue is made very beautiful, elegant, and kind. People here believe in her, and think she is a goodness of enormous kindness. Is there Guanyin in Tibet? (p. 516)

Occasionally Mao’s darker side surfaced, most notably in a conversation he had with the Dalai Lama shortly before he set off on his return journey to Tibet in March 1955. Talk between the two leaders was convivial, and Mao offered last minute words of kindly advice about how the Dalai Lama should stay in touch with him, and take care to lead the Tibetan people forward gradually. But out of the blue, he also told him that his mind was scientific and that religion is poison, and this clearly unsettled the 19 year old Tibetan leader.

The book concludes with an account of the Dalai Lama’s return to Tibet, and even this was a politically complex affair. On the journey home a key Chinese official had ignored diplomatic protocol, and failed to greet the Dalai Lama as he travelled through Sichuan Province. It was left to Premier Zhou Enlai to fly in, interrupting his journey from Indonesia to Beijing, to “give face” to the Dalai Lama, ensuring too, that Mao’s careful efforts to fete him were not undone. This tricky moment apart, as Goldstein notes:

For Mao ... the trip was a resounding success. His gradualist strategy had set out to win over the Dalai Lama and then work down through him to transform Tibet and the Tibetans. (p. 529)

The Dalai Lama also considered the trip to be a great success and came to consider both himself and Tibet to be part of the Chinese nation. Once back in Lhasa he took on a more assertive political role, heeding Chinese advice about the importance of changing slowly, but nevertheless challenging what he considered to be arcane and corrupt religious and political practice. He was soon dealing with dissent however, and anti-Chinese resistance movement had emerged while he was in China. This new political force opposed Chinese occupation and political compromise. A great deal rested on the young leader’s shoulders. Meanwhile, change was afoot in China itself, where Mao began to accelerate political reform and move towards the implementation of full communes. This radical turn did not immediately impact on Tibet, but within just a few years the gradualism that both the Dalai Lama and Mao saw as the way forward for the autonomous region of Tibet, was a policy in tatters.

Goldstein has written a stunning history of Sino-Tibetan relations in the period 1951–1955 and I look forward immensely to the publication of volume 3 which will cover the period leading to the Dalai Lama’s exile in 1959. It seems churlish to make critical comments of such a wonderful book, but I would like to have seen more explicit consideration given to the impact of geography on the political developments so eloquently discussed. I also think that greater consideration could have been given to the personal and political development of the Dalai Lama who was only 16 years old in 1951 and only 19 when he spent nearly a year in China. These are very small concerns however. I began this review by referring to the work of French
(2003), and I wholeheartedly recommend his personal history of Tibet as a starting point for anyone wanting to understand the country's modern history. In a sense, French takes the reader onto the foothills of Tibet's modern history. Once there, Goldstein's book takes the reader into unknown terrain and maps it with precision, bringing a new accuracy to a history that has been over-mythologized during the past 40 years.

Notes

1. The book is part one of a two-part study of the 1951–1959 era, and continues the study of modern Tibet begun in the author's *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (University of California Press, 1989). Part two of the study of the 1951–1959 era will focus on the stormy period of Tibet's history that culminated in the Dalai Lama's flight into exile across the Himalayas, the background to which was Mao Zedong's desire to speed up China's development and power through his Great Leap Forward.

2. The book ends with reflections on how the Dalai Lama, with the support and warnings of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, might exert his leadership to ensure that the Tibetan ruling elite would support him in envisioning a new Tibet that combined cultural and religious tradition with the project of economic, political and social modernization.

3. All of the interviews are being compiled for inclusion in the Tibet Oral History Archive and will eventually be housed in the Asian Division of the Library of Congress and be available as a Web archive.

Reference


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Back in the heady days of 1991, before a General Election, political parties were vying with each other for parental attention, claiming that genuine partnerships between schools and parents were possible and parental involvement in their children's education was crucial. A *Times Educational Supplement* Editorial (4 September 1991) actually announced that "Parents have never had it so good". It all seems somewhat different now, with parents seemingly accepted by some politicians as consumers, agents of competition, vigilantes or supplicants to schools, and with teachers and parents painfully aware of the difficulties of establishing equitable participation, dialogue and mutual understanding. This timely and informative book, with chapters originating in an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded seminar series, explores the issues surrounding the development of inclusive forms of involvement by parents in their children's education and the tensions and challenges that can arise. As the editors note in their perceptive introduction, parents are not a homogeneous group, "parental involvement" can take many forms, and a punitive discourse has developed about families seen as