



Melvyn C. Goldstein. *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: Tibet, China and the Dalai Lama*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, xiii + 152 pages, ISBN: 0-520-21254-1, US\$19.95.

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The historical and political status of Tibet in relation to China is now a highly polemicized topic in the popular media and in most published sources. It is a truly “loaded” issue, and one which also often lurks uncomfortably — and mainly unacknowledged — in the background of much recent Tibetan Studies: it is hard to avoid its potentially distorting tendencies, but it is also a distortion to avoid the issue itself. Given the state of the literature, it is difficult for non-specialists to obtain an even-handed and accessible overview of the conflict surrounding Tibet, or the “Tibet Question” as it is called in the book under review. Melvyn Goldstein, author of *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* and a leading scholar of twentieth-century Tibet, has attempted, very successfully I feel, to provide just such an overview for the non-specialist reader. His survey of the subject is also a particularly American one, and not just in the sense that the author is an American. In this book specific consideration is given to the possible role the United States might play in the future of the Tibet Question.

In a series of informative chapters (“The Imperial Era,” “De Facto Independence,” “Chinese Communist Rule,” and “The Post-Mao Era”), *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* provides a pithy historical outline of Tibet-China relations which lie at the root of the problems surrounding the Tibet

Question up to the present day. This sad story is well known, and the overall impression is one of an intractable, even hopeless political situation marked by deep mutual mistrust and ongoing cycles of dissatisfaction and tension on both sides. In *The Post-Mao Era*, the single most important point Goldstein draws our attention to is that Beijing's post-1989 "hard-line" policy in Tibet will eventually lead to the loss of any Tibetan demographic and linguistic homogeneity on the plateau — that is, to the loss of Tibet as the exclusive home of a people. It is clear to those of us who regularly visit Tibet that this is relentlessly becoming a reality. The urgency of this process and of how to arrest it is recognized by all those seriously interested in the fate of Tibet and its people. Thus, in his final and best chapter, "The Future," Goldstein offers constructive insights and tentative predictions concerning the following key questions (listed at the head of the chapter, p. 100): "How is this conflict likely to play out as we move into the twenty-first century? Is there any common ground on which to construct a reconciliation between the Dalai Lama and China? Does the United States have a role to play?"

It is clear that the Tibetans themselves, and especially the Dalai Lama, now look to the United States for their only real chance for being able to exert influence upon China over the Tibet Question. This is a realistic hope for various reasons, not least of all considering the strong pro-Tibet lobby in the United States. Yet under the Clinton presidency there has been a major shift away from policies of pressuring China (using trade, for example), towards those of building stronger bilateral relations and fostering engagement. As we have seen over the past few years, this revised course of the United States' China policy has certainly not been maintained consistently. And Goldstein rightly notes that any Tibetan interests which depend upon the changing state of American-Chinese relations can be seriously undermined when things turn sour (pp. 120–121).

At the conclusion of *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, Goldstein singles out the Dalai Lama and the United States as the pair who must bring a future constructive compromise with China into play if there is to be any movement beyond further violence, oppression and the eventual and complete marginalization of Tibetans in their own homeland.

Considering recent events, it is as if all parties have now read Goldstein's 1997 book. In June 1998, President Clinton met Chinese President Jiang Zemin and discussed the Tibet Question with him; on November 10, 1998, the Dalai Lama met President Clinton and Vice-President Gore at the White House. In press statements from both sides, strong commitments towards an American-brokered dialog between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese leadership were confirmed. Experienced Tibet-watchers

now wait — but without bated breath — to see where this expression of commitment might lead in dealing with Beijing.

While *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* is generally an excellent book in which one can accept the main facts as Goldstein presents them, there are some minor shortcomings which might mislead or confuse non-specialist readers. For one thing, the handling of romanization for Tibetan and Chinese is deficient in certain places throughout the book. Also, certain representations show that the author has a tendency to accept standard Chinese positions perhaps a little too uncritically. For example, when referring to the Panchen Lamas, the incumbents of Tibet's second most important incarnate lama lineage, Goldstein adopts the numbering system for the lineage used by all Chinese sources. He thus numbers the present contested incarnation as the eleventh. This will confuse non-specialist readers, who, when consulting most other standard works on Tibet, will find that the present incarnation would actually be numbered as the eighth. Like most aspects of the Tibet Question, even the numbering of this lineage is politicized and contested. The exiled Tibetan intelligentsia and most leading scholars of Tibet use the latter system in which the present incumbent is reckoned as the eighth (see for example W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* [New Haven, 1967]; H. E. Richardson, *Tibet and Its History* [Boulder, 1984]; and all authors in "The Lives of the Panchen Lamas," in *Lungta*, 10, Winter 1996). In an interesting exception to this usage, the most recent official publications of the Tibetan Government in exile have apparently accommodated themselves to the numbering used by the Chinese (see for example *The Panchen Lama Lineage* [Dharamsala, Department of Information and International Relations, 1996]; and *World Press on Panchen Lama* [New Delhi, Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 1996]). Such an accommodation is itself a sign of the flexibility of discourse which Dharamsala is willing to allow. A footnote, at least, about the different and contested numbering systems of the lineage would have been welcomed.

Furthermore, the map facing page ix depicts both the Indian state boundary of Arunachal Pradesh (dashed line) and the border between Tibet and India following the so-called McMahon Line (solid dark line). Here, the internal Indian state boundary is labeled as a "contested border." This is quite misleading. It is actually the McMahon Line to the north which has been actively "contested" both militarily and politically by both sides since the 1950s. This border was agreed between British India and Tibet at the Simla Convention of 1914, after the Chinese withdrew their participation. At the time of their withdrawal at Simla, the Chinese only actually contested the eastern boundary between Tibet and China and not

this southern section. Only later did official Chinese Communist sources advance claims for all Arunachal Pradesh as being part of Tibet, and hence of China.

The problems mentioned above are, to be sure, minor as far as the main content of the book is concerned.

The Snow Lion and the Dragon is an important new source on the Tibet Question. Interested readers will profit from its clear and concise treatment of the major contentious issues, and its author is to be admired for venturing constructive possibilities for their future resolution.