BOOK REVIEW
Benno Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020)
Xiaoyuan Liu *To the End of Revolution: The Chinese Communist Party and Tibet, 1949–1959* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020)

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Recent years have seen a steadily increasing number of books published on the modern history of Tibet – including not only the present-day Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), but also portions of today's Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Gansu Provinces, which roughly correspond to the historical regions of Ü-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham. Aside from works by anthropologists, linguists, political scientists, and scholars of religion, historians have also produced detailed studies on the late Qing and Republican periods. Historical research on the Maoist period has been limited however, due to difficulty accessing archival documents and other primary sources. A standout exception is the multi-volume series, *A History of Modern Tibet* by Melvyn Goldstein[1], which provides granular detail and long excerpts of documents as well as interviews with major political figures. Li Jianglin's works on Tibet, one of which has been published in English[2] and another which will be soon[3], also draw on an impressive array of sources in Chinese and Tibetan. Other works, such as Tsering Shakya's *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*[4], place the events in Tibet in the 1950s in a broader geopolitical context. But there are still significant gaps in our knowledge and understanding about the events that transpired in Tibetan regions of the new People's Republic leading up to the dramatic events of March 1959, when a full-scale uprising against Chinese rule began in Lhasa. Two recent books, Benno Weiner's *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier* and Xiaoyuan Liu's *To the End of Revolution: The Chinese Communist Party and Tibet, 1949–1959*, provide important information and interpretations on these issues, while employing unique source bases.

Weiner's book focuses on Zeku (泽库; Tsékhok), a Tibetan autonomous county (part of the Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture) created in 1953 in the greater Repgong grasslands region in eastern Qinghai/Amdo, and specifically focuses on the United Front efforts of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to win over Tibetan herders and elites in the course of the 1950s. This region and topic have been studied far less than events in the 1950s in Lhasa, and particularly at such a local level. It is also worth pointing out that Zeku was part of a true borderland zone, hundreds of miles from both Beijing and Lhasa, where Tibetan, Han, Mongol, Hui, and other cultural worlds came into close interaction and overlapped (7). These contacts bestowed on the CCP a complicated legacy of both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic violence, as well as trade, patronage, and cohabitation. CCP cadres, who were and remained mostly Han, entered a truly foreign landscape in Zeku, having had no prior experience with or knowledge about the region or the people therein.

By examining the documentary record of the effort to win over local herdsmen, Weiner concludes that the United Front was not just a façade to deceive social, ethnic, and religious groups wary of CCP rule until they could be overcome. Instead, it was the CCP's variation on "subimperial" [5] policies that their predecessors, namely the Guomindang-affiliated Ma family warlords, had employed in their control of the region, which were themselves influenced by the Qing Dynasty's pluralistic management of frontiers. Thus, the transition from imperial rule to nation-state was "contested, constructed, negotiated, and ultimately incomplete" (9). Both the Guomindang (GMD) and CCP aspired to build a nation roughly along the borders of the Qing empire, but their approaches differed, at least in rhetoric. The GMD emphasized the singularity of the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*), which the CCP has evidently reverted to in recent years (discussed in the Conclusion), whereas the CCP of the 1950s more explicitly acknowledged the multi-ethnic nature of, and inter-ethnic tensions within, the Chinese polity, and proposed a unity of the various *minzu* under the leadership of the Party, specifically within the framework of the United Front (16-17). Importantly, Weiner sees the United Front as diverging from a Qing-style system of frontier management in that it was "not simply a strategy for managing difference… but a *transformative methodology* of state and nation building," which, it was theorized, would eventually lead to class struggle among the Tibetans and ultimately to socialism (21). To paraphrase Massimo d'Azeglio (and Weiner), the CCP had built a state, but now needed to build a nation that could include Tibetans. The United Front would establish the means for Tibetans to become "masters of their own home" by throwing

off the vestiges of "feudal" society, albeit gradually and with the acquiescence of traditional elites.

Following the introduction, the first chapter examines the history of political and religious authority in the region since the late imperial period, with a focus on the Republican era and Ma family warlords, led by Ma Bufang in the late 1930s-1940s and based in Xining. The Mas used carrots and sticks to gain acquiescence, if not enthusiastic support, of religious and secular elites in Amdo, but actual administration was very light in pastoral regions. This approach was necessitated by constraints on the power of the Mas, acting as agents of the Nanjing government, but it left a legacy in which "nearly every major figure on the grasslands of what would become Zeku County was, in one fashion or another, associated with Ma Bufang" (38). Chapter 2 discusses the arrival of the People's Liberation Army and the transition from the Ma regime to the CCP. While sporadic resistance continued from remnants of Ma's forces until 1953, most elites in Amdo recognized that there was no realistic alternative to working with the CCP, just as had previously been the case with Ma Bufang. For its part, the CCP tended to approach Tibetans as victims rather than collaborators of the previous regime (44), and was willing to work through the United Front with anyone who was not actively resisting the new regime.

Chapter 3 covers the establishment of Zeku County and other autonomous administrations. Superficially, this was the beginning of the end of subimperial policies since this "autonomous" county was run by a group of CCP cadres that was almost exclusively Han at the higher levels. But, in reality, the subimperial model of the United Front continued to be the guiding ethos of CCP rule in Zeku. Continuous consultations and meetings were held with herder elites and a policy of "Three Nos" (no division of property, no class struggle, and no class delineation) was strictly adhered to (73). Even as the transition to socialism began in Han and Hui areas of Qinghai in the autumn of 1953 into 1954 (Chapter 4), Tibetan pastoral areas were excluded, and instead a number of infrastructure, education, and economic projects were pursued. A subtle but significant shift in emphasis was apparent in the language used in Party documents, from unity (*minzu tuanjie*) to production, but the practical effects of this were limited for the time being. This period also saw the establishment of a "joint committee" for pastoral chieftains in Zeku County chaired by one of their own. However, this effort only made clear the "ambivalences and tensions" built into the United Front (99), as it was overseen by a CCP Party Secretary who could override the chieftains. The lack of enthusiasm for this institution was evident by the regular tardiness or absence of chieftains to prearranged meetings, though this had at least as much to do with longstanding tensions between various chieftains on the committee as it did with the CCP. This point is important for highlighting the failure of CCP to develop unity among Tibetans, let alone between Tibetans and other ethnicities.

Chapter 4 also zooms in even more closely on Hor District, Zeku, which saw the most ambitious CCP efforts to that point to develop administrative capacities and reach the "pastoral masses," mostly through beneficial loan schemes and other social welfare programs. However, these efforts were largely a failure; high-level officials in the CCP blamed grassroots cadres for not understanding local political dynamics, while Tibetan elites blamed themselves, at least publicly, for lacking commitment to improving production and the life of poor Tibetans. Later efforts were more targeted by locality and status, aimed at providing loans and livestock to poor herdsmen. Since wealthier herders were not supposed to be forced to sell to the state, they were instead cajoled. These measures signaled the first efforts of the CCP to extend beyond a subimperial system of administration and reach directly to "the masses." Here, Weiner highlights the contradiction between United Front principles and policy implementation, where grassroots cadres were blamed for failing to "correctly" implement policies that ran contrary to the stated gradual and consultative measures of the United Front. Until this point, Tibetans had favored the CCP to Ma Bufang mostly because the new regime did not tax them and instead provided welfare. But eventually the industrialization of PRC would require extracting resources from the grasslands, extraction that was dressed up as "voluntary" sale of livestock and "patriotic taxes" (113-115).

Chapter 5 covers the Socialist High Tide in Zeku, a process which, though later halted, ultimately marked the "point of no return" (207) when the subimperial mode of the United Front began to break down. Until the summer of 1955, "socialism" was not discussed much in Zeku and few would have known what it meant. But this changed dramatically in the following year as investigations were launched to determine class status as a precondition for establishing pastoral cooperatives. Pastoral chieftains and monastic leaders were increasingly cast as exploitative remnants of "feudal society." Yet, when the cooperativization campaign ran into intense opposition, the mass slaughter of animals, and even local uprisings in the spring of 1956, the program was suspended (though not reversed). This was also a period when widespread unrest in other Tibetan regions, particularly Kham, began to increase due to similar factors as in Zeku. Again, grassroots cadres were blamed for a poor understanding of local conditions and a "rash advance" to socialism, yet there was little alternative, as "cadres were bureaucratically conditioned—and in many cases perhaps personally inclined—to err to the left" (144).

Both locally and at higher-levels, the High Tide waned in the course of 1956 and minority policies focused on shoring up the United Front. However, the High Tide had indelibly bred mistrust of the CCP in the minds of minority elites, and, for the Party, democratic reforms and socialism remained the objective even if progress towards them was temporarily halted. This drift away from the accommodations of the early 1950s was strengthened in 1957, as the emphasis shifted from criticizing Han chauvinism to criticizing local nationalism and "right conservatism." Perhaps surprisingly, the Anti-Rightist Campaign did not extensively criticize Tibetan elites or even many Tibetan cadres in Zeku for "local nationalism." Most of those actually criticized and punished were Han cadres for acts of Han chauvinism, which was seen as the root problem provoking local nationalism. Still, it was clear that the United

Front was untenable in the long run. Party reports complained that Tibetan religious and secular elites continued to enjoy luxurious lifestyles much as they had before 1949, on the back of the labor of the masses. Religious beliefs and "superstition" were as strong as ever, and trust in the Party was weak: "In short, the United Front had yet to work its magic—to replace an imperial-style relationship between the state and local elites with a direct compact between the pastoral masses and their class allies" (160).

Chapter 7, dealing with the Great Leap Forward and the dramatic events of the 1958 uprising in Amdo, is in many ways the culmination of the book. Zeku was initially somewhat marginal to these events, as simmering discontent catalyzed by a drastic leftward turn in policy in the early days of the Great Leap Forward caused a full-scale rebellion, first in March in Gannan (a Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in southern Gansu), and then in Xunhua in late April 1958. Taking advantage of the Party's loose control over the borderlands between Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan, the rebels and the rebellion shifted throughout the region, finally breaking out in Zeku in early July, where nearly one-quarter of the local population participated in some fashion. Though armed resistance only lasted a few days (springing up sporadically in the next few years), the subimperial United Front arrangement was permanently shattered. The crushing of rebellion was accompanied by democratic reforms and collectivization (Strike and Reform), a repudiation of "Three Nos," and the imprisonment or death of nearly all the leading Tibetan elites involved with United Front efforts in the preceding decade. Monasteries were attacked wholesale and many monks returned to secular life to "engage in production." "The masses" were created and reified as an identity for poor Tibetan herders through repeated "speak bitterness" struggle sessions against pastoral elites and monks. However, Weiner challenges notion that almost a decade of peace was suddenly severed; there had been resistance of various forms (including passive resistance) throughout. He also argues that, contrary to expectations, the rebellion in Amdo was most intense in areas that had not started democratic reforms or collectivization; therefore, the uprising was not so much a response to these measures being imposed as an attempt to preempt them.

Chapter 8 discusses the aftermath of the Amdo rebellion, as best as can be reconstructed from available sources, including continued unrest and famine, which proportionally was more severe in Qinghai than most other provinces of China. By late 1960, the extreme policies of the preceding two and half years were recognized to have been a mistake. Communes were unwound and returned to the earlier administrative structure, class labels were reassigned to reduce the number of herdlords and rich herders, political black marks were removed, monasteries were reopened, and some prisoners from 1958 were released (though many did not live long, as imprisonment was very detrimental to their health). But in September 1962, Mao struck back against "local nationalism," which he conflated with revisionism, in part as a reaction to the scathing "70,000 character petition" of the Tenth Panchen Lama about the Amdo Uprising. Just-rehabilitated Tibetan elites were targeted again, if not immediately, then during the Four Cleanups and Cultural Revolution. This chapter also includes extensive discussion of early Reform Era efforts to reinstitute the United Front after the Cultural Revolution and breathe new life into autonomous rule for ethnic minorities. However, there was no wholesale rehabilitation or reassessment of 1958, only individual cases of rehabilitation (200). In the conclusion, Weiner continues the narrative up to the present and discusses the legacies of 1958, including the overriding importance of that year in collective memory[6] and the ways in which the CCP's failure to reverse its judgment on those events inhibits any genuine embrace of Amdowans of *minzu tuanjie* within the framework set out by the Party.[7] The conclusion also revisits the main argument of the book about the United Front: "Rather than some Machiavellian scheme, the United Front might be better thought of as a core component of Maoist high-modernist ideology" that sought to "create a unitary, socialist, multinationality state out of the ashes of empire" (206).

This book is important not only for its interpretation of the United Front in a context where it usually is not examined (generally it has been interpreted in relation to intellectuals and other urban elites), but also for showing how the CCP tried to adapt to the dilemma of governance they inherited in former Qing borderlands. It also is notable for its focus on a region of Tibet that has not been extensively covered in scholarship, and for its focus on the 1958 uprising in Amdo, far less-known than the 1959 uprising in Lhasa. Weiner's source base of hundreds of reports from the County Party Committee and the County People's Government would be remarkable enough for a Han-majority region of China, and is virtually unheard of for ethnic minority regions of the PRC. These documents allow Weiner to paint an extremely detailed portrait of the local political landscape, the complex interests and animosities at play, and the *dramatis personae* (in particular, a number of Chinese officials deeply involved in United Front Work and the leaders of local chiefdoms). The "Note on Sources, Transliteration, and Nomenclature" which precedes the Introduction provides some very important insights on researching the Maoist period and specifically ethnic minority and borderlands regions of the PRC, and would itself be useful reading for upper-level undergraduates or graduate students working with primary sources from this period. Weiner is honest throughout about the limits and interpretation of his sources – even with unprecedented access, the picture is murky: Were Tibetan participants in the United Front acting of their own accord or under pressure? Did they really believe in the program they were asked to endorse or were they just trying to survive as best as possible in a new political paradigm? "In truth, the documents simply do not allow us to determine what degree of support the Party's transformative agenda enjoyed among Amdo Tibetans or other minority communities" (209). Finally, it is worth mentioning that the book has wonderful photos, maps, illustrations, and appendices that help bring the narrative to life.

Xiaoyuan Liu's book is equally impressive for its use of previously unexamined archival sources, but Liu's focus is at a higher-level than Weiner. Building on his earlier works dealing

with Chinese frontier policies across the 1949 divide,[8] Liu covers much of the same ground as Goldstein, but whereas Goldstein discusses the words and actions of both Tibetan and Chinese leaders (focusing primarily on the former), Liu analyzes the internal discussion of the CCP bureaucracy. Or, as Liu puts it in the Introduction, his approach is Sinocentric whereas Goldstein's is Tibetocentric (5). In addressing this topic, Liu draws on archival documents from various levels of the party bureaucracy, public security forces, and intelligence reports that historians are rarely if ever able to see. Liu interprets Beijing's policies towards Tibet through four "timescapes:" a geo-ethno-security landscape (here Liu roughly agrees with Weiner that borderlands of the early PRC era were not exactly a continuation of the Qing empire, and not yet a nation-state, but something which combined elements of both); the modern transformation of Chinese territoriality (shifting from a *tianxia* system of tribute/dependency to a modern system of sovereignty based on hard borders and territory as legitimacy); the Chinese revolution (which CCP leaders would not deem as having been completed without the revolution reaching Tibet as well); and the Cold War (wherein Beijing increasingly saw Tibet as a major vulnerability for foreign intrusion or invasion) (5-12).

Following the Introduction, Chapter 1 covers the history of the relationship between Tibet and China proper from the early Qing through the Republican era, noting the evolution of Qing policies and their legacies for later Chinese regimes. Importantly, in the late eighteenth century, Qing policy shifted, "reconceptualizing Tibet from a frontier to be guarded against, or *fangbian* [防边], to a frontier to be defended, or *bianfang* [边防]" (16). In other words, though Tibet was still seen as clearly distinct and was in many respects self-governing, it had been incorporated into the Qing "political realm" (this shift was related to Qianlong's military campaigns against the Gurkhas in the 1780s and 1790s). Liu also points out the continuities between the Qing "ordained patronage" of Tibet's indigenous religious-political governing structure and early approaches by the CCP towards Tibet, including the interconnection between Tibetan and Mongolian affairs (18-19). Liu provides fascinating detail on the shifts in CCP policy towards Tibet during the Chinese Civil War. The CCP had limited experience with Tibet and, while Mao intended to incorporate Tibet in some fashion, it was not initially considered ripe for "liberation" nor even mentioned on agendas for domestic priorities. This attitude began to shift in the summer of 1949. In July, Lhasa expelled the handful of Guomindang officials and agents present in Tibet and began to take an anticommunist line, likely hoping to gain American and British support for continued *de facto* independence. Meanwhile, near the end of 1949, the CCP saw promise in their discussions with the just-enthroned Tenth Panchen Lama and also suffered military setbacks in their effort to take Jinmen Island off the coast of Fujian. By the time of his trip to Moscow in December, Mao had indicated that the timeline for liberating Tibet needed to be sped up and that the liberation of Tibet was a central task of wider nation-building and anti-imperial struggles. (35).

Chapter 2 discusses the PLA's entry into Chamdo in October 1950, as well as the complex negotiations that preceded and succeeded the brief military encounters of that month. Even by the start of 1950, the CCP knew very little about the situation in Tibet, and relied on a variety of sources to determine which course to pursue. CCP internal discussions in 1950 gradually coalesced towards a rough outline of what would become the Seventeen Point Agreement, signed the following year. This arrangement left the Dalai Lama government intact and put off social reforms for an indeterminate amount of time while also allowing for continued freedom of religious practice. Uncertainty about the pace of reform in Tibet became the central question of the CCP's Tibet policy in the 1950s. Liu shows that CCP leaders themselves were unclear about this question, with Mao claiming in May 1951 that the pace of "a turtle slowly climbing a mountain" would still be too fast for social reforms in Tibet, yet suggesting to Deng Xiaoping two months later that reforms would begin in three years (57). Beijing continued to support an accommodating line on religion and working with Tibetan elites, while limiting direct interactions with the Tibetan masses. At the same time, internal, high-level correspondence reiterated that ideological struggle was not being permanently shelved, only delayed (62). These confusions carried over into the issue of what sort of political representation Beijing would have in Tibet. After exploring various threads in discussion with Lhasa and internally, the CCP settled on a "Central Representative" with unclear authority and responsibilities, which some historians have likened to the Qing *ambans*. Along with friction over the joint management of Tibetan issues between the Northwest and Southwest Bureaus, the role of the Central United Front Department (CUFD), and infighting within (and over) the Tibet Work Committee (TWC), it is fair to say that, after having established a form of sovereignty over Tibet, the plan on what to do, or who was even "in charge" of Tibet policy, was highly uncertain. This uncertainty stabilized somewhat in late 1954-early 1955, with the abolishment of regional bureaus, preparations for the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region (not completed until 1965) and a number of meetings between the Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama, and high level CCP officials, including Mao. However, by this time, CCP policy was shifting towards a greater emphasis on socialist transformation, culminating in the Socialist High Tide of late 1955-early 1956, including in many ethnic minority regions.

Chapter 3 discusses these changes, and how the CCP transitioned from a policy of "smart class struggle" in ethnic minority areas (delaying class conflict and ideological struggle, especially in areas near international borders) in 1953-54, towards more radical policies in Tibetan-inhabited areas outside of Tibet proper (today's TAR). Namely, Tibetan regions of Xikang Province (merged into Sichuan in 1955), Gansu, Yunnan, and Qinghai were no longer categorically ensconced from land reform and cooperativization. At this point, Mao was still vague about when reforms would begin in Tibet, but put the date at least several years into the future (107). However, when provincial-level officials (particularly in Sichuan) began exploring the possibility of democratic reforms and socialist transformation in ethnic minority regions, their projects were

not contradicted by the Party Center, and they hoped that transformation of the Tibetan regions of their provinces would serve as a model for Tibet (113-114). In the event, the "democratic reforms" led to tremendous upheaval, what Liu calls the "reform war," in several provinces, most dramatically in western Sichuan, where nearly all Tibetan and Yi areas were in open revolt in 1956 (counter-insurgency operations continued into the early 1960s, killing tens of thousands of "rebels" and "bandits"). Providing long excerpts from primary sources and later memoirs by major actors in the Chinese leadership, Liu shows that officials in Sichuan were far more willing to launch reforms that would result in further conflict than the Party Center (with some exceptions - Deng especially was a hardliner on this issue) or the CUFD, who blamed the unrest on cadres' overzealousness and poor understanding of non-Han societies. In remarks at a conference held in late July 1956 to respond to the uprisings, Mao charted a middle course, suggesting leniency for rebels and acknowledging a domineering attitude of many party cadres (even calling the CCP's entire liberation project in non-Han areas "arrogant"), but also insisting that the conflict at hand was a necessary and correct liberation and class struggle, and that the Party had been attacked rather than being the instigator (126-129). Mao's long exposition on the unrest provided enough rhetorical ammunition for both moderates and radicals to use in pursuit of their preferred policies; for the time being, consultation and cautiousness became the guiding principles, but the groundwork was already being laid for further struggles. It is worth mentioning that hardliners and moderates shared a view of the ultimate problems and goals in Tibetan and Yi areas of Sichuan, and only disagreed on the pace of reforms and the degree to which violent struggle would be necessary.

Lhasa was deeply unnerved by these events, and statements (including by CUFD head Li Weihan) to the effect that reforms in Sichuan would be an inspiration for reforms in Tibet. But conciliatory messaging from Beijing and the enlistment of Sangye Yeshe (Tianbao), a Kham native and member of the Provincial Party Committee, as a prominent moderating voice, calmed the situation temporarily. The Party Center also decided, internally, to delay reforms in Tibet as a result of the unrest in Sichuan. However, in September 1956, Deng Xiaoping became the Secretary-General of the CCP Central Secretariat, giving him a commanding role over many policy matters. When Sichuan officials pushed to relaunch reforms in western Sichuan in early 1957, Deng endorsed their confrontational approach. Mao also supported this agenda, even if it led to further warfare, so long as the PLA did not fire the first shot. Thus, a "comprehensive" political and military struggle ensued in the summer of 1957, which continued into 1959(139-141). As in the initial conflicts of 1956, the PLA had difficulty distinguishing rebels from civilians, and many unarmed people were killed (142). In the background, by mid-1957, the Anti-Rightist Campaign had led to reluctance to voice any "right" or conservative opinions. The formerly moderate Sangye Yeshe, judging the changing political direction, called for more thoroughgoing reforms in Sichuan (144-145). As Weiner also notes, at this point the CCP was trapped in a paradox of its own making – having initially developed a (subimperial) nationality policy focused on ethnic minority elites, the Party transitioned to a focus on liberation and class struggle that would directly target those same elites. When Tibetan "serfs" and Yi "slaves" joined their oppressors in rebellion against the CCP's democratic reforms, the Party determined, after a brief period of moderation, to double down on class warfare and, implicitly, interethnic warfare.

Chapter 4 discusses the interactions between Lhasa and Beijing over the Kham uprisings. Liu points out that, at the time (1956), CCP documents talked about the potential fallout of unrest in Sichuan for Tibet, but did not blame Lhasa for instigating the unrest, instead focusing on "KMT bandits and secret agents." However, after the 1959 uprising in Lhasa, the "Dalai Lama clique" was retroactively blamed for plotting unrest in Kham (148-150). In fact, Liu shows that the Dalai Lama and his associates had tried to calm the anxieties of Khampa elites and monasteries, and helped to spread the "sweet rain" of the CCP's conciliatory United Front message that predominated prior to late 1955. This chapter further highlights the contradictory approach of Beijing during and after the Kham unrest, on the one hand moving forward with the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region and committing to gradual reforms that would not attack religion, while on the other hand laying out a timetable for reform of Tibet proper for the first time (in February 1956), with Mao suggesting that "peaceful and consultative" land reform was likely if not inevitable in the near future. These events, along with a visit by a "Central Delegation" led by Chen Yi to Lhasa, unnerved the Tibetan leadership, who had received a steady stream of horrifying accounts from refugees from Kham. Chen's delegation uncovered the lack of support for the CCP in Tibet at all levels of society, but still advocated proceeding with reforms. At this point (July 1956), Mao endorsed such an approach, and, while hoping that conflict could be avoided, conceded that it was inevitable (177-78). In June, preparations were made by the TWC to recruit more police, cadres, and Communist Youth League members in Tibet while various CCP leaders tried to determine the Dalai Lama's attitude towards reforms and coax him to encourage them (181-183). But, an armed uprising in Chamdo in late July 1956 caused Beijing to quickly hit the brakes in the closing months of 1956. As Weiner also notes, this did not exactly mean a return to pre-1956 policies and approaches, but rather a temporary pause of the reform process (189).

As Liu elaborates in Chapter 5, this "waiting game" period, which was meant to pause reform in Tibet for six years, in reality only lasted until early 1959. During this period, complex machinations occurred in both Beijing and Lhasa. Indications are that Mao was receiving conflicting information about Tibet during this time, causing him to issue confusing statements about how to approach the issue. He was also clearly concerned about the geopolitical context, including uprisings in Poland and Hungary and the Dalai Lama's visit to India in November 1956 (194-197). With continued unrest in Sichuan and Chamdo, rumors abounded within the CCP about a potential uprising in Lhasa. While major decisions from Beijing were still made by Mao, the specifics were handled by the TWC,

which was under more direct control of the Central Secretariat (led by Deng) from late 1956, and which was preparing for a future battle with Tibetan elites (210). This chapter also extensively covers the diplomatic efforts of Zhou Enlai with the Dalai Lama and Nehru, as well as the role of foreign goods being "smuggled" into Tibet as a factor in Beijing's decision-making. After scrutinizing the archival record, Liu concludes that Beijing was pursuing a two-track approach towards Tibet at this time, trying to prepare the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan establishment for unavoidable reforms, while also speeding up the transition to socialism in Tibetan areas of neighboring provinces (245).

Chapter 6 covers the Lhasa uprising in March 1959 and its immediate background. For Liu, these events cannot be understood without taking into account the geopolitics of the time and the effects of the Great Leap Forward on Tibetan areas in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan. The rapid implementation of collectivization policies and anti-religious attacks that accompanied the early phase of the Great Leap added fuel to the simmering fire that remained from the unrest in Kham. As discussed above, large rebellions broke out in areas of Qinghai and Gansu in March and April, 1958. At the same time, Beijing was receiving troubling intelligence reports about the activities of Tibetan exiles in India and elsewhere, suggesting an international plot to destabilize Tibet. With all this in mind, Mao practically welcomed an uprising by elites in Tibet so that reforms could be carried out, just as rebellions in Tibetan regions of other provinces gave the CCP a pretense for eschewing any sort of conciliatory United Front policies (254-257). A number of armed uprisings did in fact occur in Tibet in the summer of 1958 and were pushing the Kashag into an impossible position, but the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis temporarily distracted Beijing's attention. Meanwhile, rebels increased in number and were more brazen in attacking the PLA. Mao again welcomed this and repeated an earlier assertion that the bigger the convulsion in Tibet, the better it would be, since reforms and class conflict could be undertaken more rapidly (262-63). Accordingly, on March 10, 1959 and in the following days, the correspondence back and forth between the TWC, PLA, and Party Center show that the PLA and TWC were advised to invite attacks rather than strike first, in order to maximize sympathy for the CCP and PLA among the Tibetan masses (268). With conflict out in the open, suppression of the rebellion was really only a prelude to the real work of rapidly reforming Tibetan society, with a strong emphasis on class war and attacks on religion. Due to the lack of any preparatory work and because the CCP was so thinly dispersed in Tibet, these efforts were violent but brief. Along with a general cooling down of the Great Leap Forward in the early 1960s, a number of more moderate policies were put into place, but the underlying situation had already permanently changed.

Liu's epilogue focuses on geopolitical aspects of events in Lhasa in 1959 and their connection with Sino-Indian tensions. There is no question that the Cold War was important, but at least as important was the fact that India and China were both aiming to incorporate their Himalayan frontiers into the national geo-body (298-300). This chapter also talks about Chiang Kai-Shek's reaction to the Lhasa Uprising, and the role of Sino-Indian border disputes in the Sino-Soviet Split (304-308).

Overall, as with Weiner's book, the sources employed by Liu are truly remarkable, including documents from provincial, prefectural, and county archives, among them Garze (Ganzi) Prefecture, which was so central to the unrest in Kham that presaged the end of the CCP's accommodationist approach in Tibetan regions. To this, Liu adds documents from the Foreign Ministry Archive, classified periodicals, published primary source collections, documents from archives in the United States and United Kingdom, and a number of unpublished materials. These sources allow Liu to provide a fly-on-the-wall perspective of the internal discussions of the CCP towards Tibet. Liu is aware of the issues with these sources and how to interpret them, for instance, pointing to two conflicting records of Mao's remarks about Lhasa's role in the Sichuan unrest (149-150). At various points, he admits that the documentary record simply cannot provide a clear explanation for certain events or decisions. Like Goldstein, as a benefit to the reader, Liu includes very long translated quotations from primary sources, which is especially helpful as many of Liu's sources are not widely available and have not been used in any publication.

Read in conjunction, the two books comprehensively show similar processes playing out at different levels. While Liu focuses on high-level correspondence back and forth between the frontier and the center, Weiner zeros in on the implementation of policies in a single county along the frontier. Prior to the final chapter, Liu concentrates on Beijing, Lhasa, and Kham, while Weiner is squarely rooted in Amdo. Both books emphasize the importance of the CCP's predecessors in laying the conceptual and practical groundwork for the PRC's efforts to incorporate Tibet and other frontier regions. Weiner and Liu also agree that there was an inherent tension between the CCP's goals of preventing instability in frontier regions while also staying true to their vision of socialist revolution. Finally, the books also concur that the Socialist High Tide and overall leftist turn of late 1955-early 1956 was critical in souring any possibility for a more gradual and accommodationist project of incorporation.

While the books agree on the goals of the CCP and the course of policy changes, they seem to disagree slightly on the operation of United Front policies and outreach efforts. Liu's book argues that Beijing was briefly willing to attempt modest reforms within the existing theocratic structure in Tibet, led by the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, but in reality lay in wait for an opportunity to pounce on Tibetan elites, and thus their commitments to patience were insincere. On the other hand, Weiner contends that the United Front genuinely sought to enlist elites as intermediaries in the governing system and avoid any drastic changes that would antagonize them to the point of revolt. Though accommodationist policies were always understood to be a temporary measure until the consciousness of the masses was raised to a sufficient level, this transformation was initially (at least until mid-1955) expected

to be a long process, and it was hoped that the elites themselves would gradually accept the reduction of their wealth and privileges. This may seem naïve, but Weiner provides us with the words of the herdlords themselves to this effect, while also noting that the context of these statements (meetings with CCP officials) was far from neutral. These somewhat different interpretations likely result from the different source bases of the two books and their consequent focus on different levels of interaction between the Party-State and Tibetans.

It is also possible that these interpretations and their sources reflect an unintentional failure of communication, or an intentional restriction of information, between different levels and offices of the CCP. After all, grassroots cadres were not always privy to information (directives, correspondence, internal publications) shared with provincial party committees. Mid-level officials could often drive the agenda by enthusiastically pursuing radical policies which were unpopular at the local level and a source of irritation for the Party Center, even though these fervent mid-level officials thought that they were acting in accordance with Mao's wishes. Likewise, different branches of the Party-State followed different imperatives. Party cadres in the provincial, prefectural, and county party committees operated in an unfamiliar environment and were continuously pressured from above to deliver results, especially on the economic front, while also preventing unrest which those very policies were likely to provoke. In the end, as Weiner notes, they tended towards reform and maximizing production, even if it meant destabilizing the situation and criticism from above after the fact. On the other hand, United Front organizations and forums, along with moderates on *minzu* policy in the Party Center, sought to slow the pace of reforms to avoid conflict. For his part, Mao officiated and vacillated between these two poles, but, as with his political orientation more broadly, when push came to shove he tended towards struggle and revolution. As Liu notes, the voices of moderates were not completely ignored and did influence policy, but theirs was doomed to be a losing struggle because incorporating the frontier was one of a number of essential projects in the early PRC period: "As a newly established revolutionary regime in its radical phase, Beijing forged ahead, peacefully if possible and violently if necessary" (147).

I hope that I have done the authors justice in these overviews of their arguments and evidence. In addition to the issues just raised, I would like to ask the authors if, in light of their own work and the existing literature (especially Goldstein), what major questions or points of disagreement they feel are unresolved in the story of Tibet's incorporation into the PRC. On a related note, since both authors were able to access extraordinary sets of sources, and since research on the history of the PRC has become even more difficult in recent years, what future research directions are possible for scholars interested in the modern history of Tibet?

[1] *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951 : The Demise of the Lamaist State* (University of California Press, 1989); *A history of modern Tibet. Vol. 2 The calm before the storm: 1951-1955* (University of California Press, 2009); *A history of modern Tibet. Vol. 3 The storm clouds descend: 1955-1957* (University of California Press, 2014); *A History of Modern Tibet, Vol. 4: In the Eye of the Storm, 1957-1959* (University of California Press, 2019)

[2] Jianglin Li, Susan Wilf (trans.), *Tibet in Agony : Lhasa 1959* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

[3] Jianglin Li, Stacey Mosher (trans.), *When the iron bird flies: China's secret war in Tibet* (Stanford University Press, 2022)

[4] Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the land of snows : a history of modern Tibet since 1947* (Penguin, 2000).

[5] Uradyn Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism: The Politics of Friendship on China's Mongolian Frontier* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010)

[6] As was the case in a number of other ethnic minority regions, 1958 is often seen as the year that the CCP arrived and a year of rupture in the collective identity of the group, to the extent that it is spoken of not so much as a specific year as it is a historical dividing line. See, for example, Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts, Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (University of California Press, 2001) and Magnus Fiskesjo, "The fate of sacrifice and the making of Wa history" PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2000.

[7] A recent work that looks at Kham and the legacy of the late 1950s is Barbara Demick, *Eat the Buddha: Life and Death in a Tibetan Town* (Random House, 2020)

[8] *Reins of liberation: an entangled history of Mongolian independence, Chinese territoriality, and great power hegemony, 1911-1950* (Stanford University Press, 2006); *Recast all under heaven : revolution, war, diplomacy, and frontier China in the 20th century* (Continuum, 2010).

Response

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I want to start by thanking Steven Pieragastini for his thoughtful, generous review of the books by Xiaoyuan Liu and myself, and to the editors of *The PRC History Review* both for commissioning the review and for putting them side-by-side. Although in many respects the books are quite different, in tandem I think they make a strong case that as the field of PRC history develops a crucial component must be the study of China's ethnocultural borderlands and non-Han people. After all, the CCP's success in reconstructing *most* of the territorial dimensions and demographic diversity of the Qing Empire is among the most consequential accomplishments of the early-PRC period. Coming to a better understanding how and why this occurred and at what cost for the now more than 100 million people that were minoritized in the process is not an issue of peripheral importance but one of the key questions of modern Chinese history, and the repercussions are among the core unresolved tensions that the current leadership seems determined to finally resolve. This is a two-way street, of course. With some exceptions, books on Tibetan regions often have not engaged scholarship on modern China in a serious manner, choosing instead to portray the Tibetan case as unique and exceptional. One qualm I do have with Professor Liu's fine book is his insinuation that Chinese and Tibetan studies "are two distinct scholarly disciplines" (1) that cannot (or perhaps need not) speak to one another (I review Liu's book here). They can and must. In fact, one of my primary goals was to write a book about a Tibetan region within the PRC that would be useful not only to those who research and write about non-Han people and areas of the Chinese state, but also to the majority of scholars of modern China that do not. And I urge my colleagues in the latter category to reciprocate where possible—to think beyond the Han even when their topics are not specifically about "minority" issues. A useful example is Jeremy Brown's new study of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, which includes a chapter on how events in Beijing connected to riots in Lhasa, clashes between Han and Tibetan students in Lanzhou, and even anti-African protests in Nanjing.[1] While I am still atop my soapbox, please consider taking a look at my short essay in *The PRC History Review* which argues for the importance of including content on non-Han people and places in courses on modern Chinese and PRC history and contains a suggestion or two for doing so.

The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier and Liu's *To the End of the Revolution* are in many ways complimentary studies. While Liu's book is an impressive work of top-down political history focusing almost entirely on elite decision-making, my book looks at how, why, and to what effect the CCP's United Front policies were implemented at the grassroots level in the Zeku (Tsékhok) Tibetan Autonomous County and wider Amdo region (most of Qinghai, southern Gansu, and parts of northern Sichuan). As Pieragastini notes, this may help account for what appears to be the most glaring discrepancy between the two. Liu suggests that United Front moderation was more of a stop-gap measure, as Pieragastini writes, that Party leaders "in reality lay in wait for an opportunity to pounce on Tibetan elites, and thus their commitment to gradualism was insincere." Liu may be correct. However, in Amdo that sentiment was not communicated to rank-in-file cadres, nor, as far as I can tell, to intermediate officials. Instead, I argue that the United Front—here meaning the indefinite suspension of class struggle and the gradual implementation of the Party's programs through traditional elite intermediaries—was considered a "transformative mechanism" by which Amdo's inhabitants were first to be made into minority nationalities and then into members of the multi-*minzu* socialist nation. As elsewhere in Maoist China, this demanded the participation of those targeted for transformation, which in Amdo was meant to be achieved through a dialectical approach referred to as "consultation and persuasion." Of course, rather than an honest give-and-take it was designed to get consent for and participation in the Party's pre-determined objectives. Although in principle not unlike mass line concepts employed in Han regions, United Front practices in Amdo cannot be understood without considering the drastically asymmetrical ethnocultural power relations that operated (and continue to operate) in non-Han areas.

While I argue that the United Front was not a cynical act of subterfuge, for some time while writing the book I struggled to articulate an alternative framing. Rather than speaking of "belief" or "sincerity," I instead settled on referring to the United Front as the "institutional ethos" of the CCP in Qinghai that reflected the manner in which the Party—not as individuals but as an institution—understood its own presence and practices of sovereignty in Amdo and perhaps other "minority nationality" areas. It was instrumentalized, but in the sense of James Scott's concept of "high modernism;"[2] it was imagined as a quasi-scientific, rational, and progressive means to first nationalize (and in the process minoritize) Tibetans and other non-Han people and thereby make them legible and only then to "gradually and voluntarily" integrate them into the wider socialist state and nation… Until it wasn't. And that is the story I try to tell.

The other thing I want to highlight here is the monumental levels of state violence visited upon Tibetans and others inhabitants of Amdo in 1958 and subsequent years, and to consider its long-term consequences. Recent Chinese history is so riddled with violence that we as historians can sometimes become a bit inured to its ongoing impact. In Amdo, tens of thousands were arrested and tortured, including nearly all of the region's religious and secular leaderships. Many thousands were killed. People were hunted down and shot in cold blood.

Communities were destroyed. Children were taken from their parents. Famine was pervasive. So bad was the situation that when Wang Zhao 王昭 was transferred from Beijing to become Qinghai's 1st Party Secretary in late 1961, he admitted that over the previous three years security forces had committed "unforgiveable crimes."

Of course, members of the Han majority also suffered (and committed) acts of tremendous violence during the campaigns of the Maoist era. And some Tibetans were participants in the state violence committed against their coethnics. The point isn't to rank levels of suffering against one another. But I do think there is a qualitative difference that needs to be acknowledged. The jury is still out on how effective the Party's discursive and policy efforts were in reinforcing the legitimacy of CCP rule after Mao's death while also attending to the widespread violence that had been committed in its name. However, as I say in the book, the one thing the Reform-era leadership presumably did not need to do among Han communities was repair the notion of the nation itself. This was not the case within many non-Han communities such as Amdo Tibetans. The United Front was fashioned to be the mechanism that would transform former imperial subjects into socialist citizens and bind them to the Chinese nation. While there are many reasons to doubt that it would have succeeded had United Front gradualism not been overwhelmed by revolutionary impatience, the violence through which incorporation did occur has made it difficult for the state to formulate a convincing argument that explains to Amdo Tibetans and other forcibly minoritized people their stake in the Han dominated nation-state. For instance, in Amdo the temporal markers that undergird narratives of nationhood simply do not work. For most Amdo Tibetans, there was no liberation in 1949 after a century of humiliation, and the dawn of the Reform era did not signal the end of ten years of leftist deviation. Instead, there was "year '58" (*nga brgyad lo*). This was the moment that Amdo became part of China. This was the point of rupture, "when the earth and sky were turned upside down."[3] Rather than an "organic transformation" in which "the old gradually weakens and the new gradually takes root," as the director of Qinghai's United Front Work Department had once predicted, Amdo was integrated into the PRC through massive and often indiscriminate employment of state violence, the very outcome the United Front was designed to avoid. And that original sin, committed within living memory, continues to color the relationship between Amdo Tibetans and the Chinese state and nation to this day. How could it not?

I do want to quickly respond to Pieragastini's concluding questions. Despite the growing number of studies of "Tibet" under Mao—to those Pieragastini mentions we can add Tsering Woeser's *Forbidden Memory: Tibet during the Cultural Revolution*, Nicole Willock's *Lineages of the Literary: Tibetan Buddhist Polymaths of Socialist China*, and the work of Dáša Pejchar Mortensen, among others[4]—what we do not know simply far outnumbers what we do. I frankly do not think "Tibet" is a particularly useful unit of analysis. Thanks to Goldstein, Shakya, and Liu, the story of Central Tibet's (Ütsang) political incorporation and the geopolitics that allowed it are pretty well covered, even if there remain differences in interpretation and details that are yet to be uncovered. What we know much less about, and what interests me far more, are some of the questions that have animated the field of PRC history in recent years: what was everyday life like for those classified as Tibetans, what forms of resistance were seen, how did the bureaucracy operate, how were processes of minoritization and class consciousness expressed, etc., and how did these vary from place to place. I like to think my book is a step in these directions, but so much is left to be done. Given the state of politics in the PRC today, which has made it much more dangerous for researchers and especially informants than it was even a few years ago, and the blanket restrictions on archival access in most Tibetan regions, I unfortunately am not confident we will have answers to many of these questions anytime soon. Building off Pieragastini's observation that 1958 was not only a pivotal year in the incorporation of Amdo but also for other non-Han communities, one thing that can be done is to encourage more (perhaps collaborative) work that crosses ethnic and geographical lines so a fuller portrait of what life was like for "minority nationalities" under high socialism can be brought into focus.

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[1] Jeremy Brown, *June Fourth: The Tiananmen Protests and Beijing Massacre of 1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[2] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998).

[3] Naktang Nulo, *My Tibetan Childhood: When Ice Shattered Stone* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

[4] Tsering Woeser, *Forbidden Memory: Tibet during the Cultural Revolution*, photographs by Tsering Dorje, edited by Robert Barnett, translated by Susan T. Chen, forward by Wang Lixiong (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2020); Nicole D. Willock, *Lineages of the Literary: Tibetan Buddhist Polymaths of Socialist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021); Dáša Pejchar Mortensen, "Historical Amnesia in Gyalthang: The Legacy of Tibetan Participation in the Cultural Revolution," in *Contested Memories: Tibetan History under Mao Retold*, eds. Robert Barnett, Benno Weiner, and Françoise Robin, 275-308 (Leiden: Brill, 2020).