

Book Reviews

Carole McGranahan. *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Harris Mylonas, George Washington University

Carole McGranahan has written an important book on the Tibetan resistance in China and the lives of the refugees in Nepal and India, as well as the politics of history and memory. This book is the product of extensive research conducted from 1994 to 2009 in Tibetan refugee communities in India and Nepal. Focusing on the history and politics of the guerrilla army Chushi Gangdrug, McGranahan combines ethnographic and historical material to narrate a history of Tibetan resistance and its complex relationship with Tibetan history, Tibetan culture, and the Dalai Lama.

In the book McGranahan coins the term “arrested histories,” which she uses to reconcile the conflicts between memories of a covert violent past and the official history of nonviolence, between secret links to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the homegrown nature of the Tibetan resistance, and between the different regional identities and the unitary Tibetan identity forged after the late 1950s.

McGranahan presents a wide range of “arrested” facts and interpretations, including important details about the Dalai Lama’s exit from China, the covert guerrilla operations, the lives of the refugees, and the politics of the community. Although the CIA’s involvement has been covered extensively over the past fifteen years (including in the pages of the JCWS), McGranahan sheds important light on the “arrested” voices of the Tibetan resistance fighters and retired CIA officers she has interviewed. She presents the local perspective rather than just the perspective from Lhasa or the Dalai Lama and a more complex relationship with the Guomindang and the Communists. For instance, we see that some Tibetans collaborated with the Nationalists and others with the Communists. The book also provides a comprehensive account of the involvement of a wide range of actors: India, Nepal, and even Taiwan.

McGranahan weaves together the lives of ordinary Tibetans with the diplomatic and military events in a superb manner—although sometimes this effort makes the text difficult to follow. In a way, McGranahan wants—consciously or subconsciously—to put the day-to-day lives of the fighters and their refugee experiences in India and Nepal on the same plane as the diplomatic maneuvering of elites and geopolitical developments. She provides a portrait of Chushi Gangdrug’s place in the overall geopolitical picture while at the same time illuminating the internal dynamics—including disputes over the chain of command, the important regional

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cleavages that existed, and the tensions between the resistance and the Tibetan government—both prior to 1959 and later on while in exile.

The main problem with this unorthodox methodology is that some chapters lack a coherent narrative. The lack of coherence might not necessarily be perceived as a weakness—after all, life in every one of the book's particular episodes is messy. At other points, however, the narrative is too coherent, coming directly from interviews with some of the participants. Because McGranahan recognizes that the interviews she has collected are fragments and are not authoritative or representative of the experiences of all fighters—she dedicates a significant portion of her introduction to reiterating this point—the occasional moments when she does rely on individual interlocutors are jarring within an otherwise complex and aware account.

McGranahan is (re)writing the history of the movement while at the same time helping to construct the untold history of the lives of Tibetan fighters living in exile and the politics surrounding the memory of the events from the 1950s onward. The differences in perspective among the various participants are instructive, if unsurprising. For the CIA, the capturing of “a Chinese army commander's pouch, bloodstained and perforated by bullets” (p. 149), which contained extremely informative documents, remains the most important moment of the Tibet operation. But this event does not even come up in the narratives of some former guerrillas and is ranked as relatively unimportant by most of those who do mention it. As explained by McGranahan, this apparent disagreement resulted from the former fighters' inability to interpret the information contained in the captured documents. What they do remember is that their pay increased after the seizure.

But this is ultimately a book about the Tibetan resistance. When the United States ceased funding the guerrillas, one of their leaders contemplated asking for support from the Soviet Union or Taiwan. His goal was “regaining Tibet by whatever means necessary and with help from whomever might offer it” (p. 157). The loss of U.S. support and the Dalai Lama's order to halt the operations in Mustang in the early 1970s shattered the Chushi Gangdrug soldiers' hopes, and they became “orphans of the Cold War,” as former CIA officer John Kenneth Knaus wrote in the title of his 1997 book published by Stanford University Press.

McGranahan also explores what becomes of these memories and the truth behind them as time marches on. Tensions among the exiles about the future of the movement persist in the Tibetan diaspora. McGranahan recognizes the tension between the violent past and the official rhetoric; but she does not believe that these arrested histories undermine the contemporary policy of nonviolence. That may be why many of these veterans decided to speak with her so openly.

McGranahan weaves into the narrative, in a meaningful way, Michel Foucault's microphysics of power, Benedict Anderson's imagined communities and the role of *Tibet Mirror* in the Tibetan movement, and the unsettling of internal hierarchies and authorities theorized by Giorgio Agamben and Milan Kundera. She runs their arguments, as well as ideas from Walter Benjamin, Clifford Geertz, Jacques Derrida, Wendy Brown, and others through the realities she unearthed in her research, applying to them her own theoretical gloss.

The book offers a methodological lesson. Diplomatic history has to be coupled with oral history, especially on topics for which archival materials are unlikely to be declassified. These oral histories can change the regime of truth of the official or standard narrative of events. Additionally, this approach allows McGranahan to develop themes that lie outside the mainstream of diplomatic history, such as gender, the preservation of tradition in exile, and the politics of memory and identity. The book also includes invaluable historiographic discussions, often involving films, which serve as a plausibility test for her argument.

A *silence* of the book is the Chinese side. The Chinese perspective and sources are absent. I mean not the Chinese interpretation of the events but any information about the degree of knowledge the Chinese had about the Chushi Gangdrug and, more importantly, about the external backing the guerrillas were receiving from the United States, India, Nepal, and other countries. This omission is perhaps explained by the fact that McGranahan is an anthropologist and not a diplomatic historian, but one wonders whether the Chinese story did not come up more in the interviews and in her research. Is this perhaps another arrested history?

McGranahan's important book builds on the existing literature and complicates our understanding of Tibet and the Tibetan resistance, moving beyond the equation of Buddhism and the Dalai Lama with non-violence, beyond the assumption that Tibetans are a homogeneous, undifferentiated ethnic group. Anthropologists, historians, political scientists, policymakers, and anyone who cares about the Tibetan cause should read it.



Thomas J. Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011. 306pp.

Reviewed by Warren I. Cohen, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Thomas Christensen has written a superb history of U.S.–East Asian relations from 1949 to 1969, in the service of theories that reveal he is actually a political scientist—a great loss to the historical profession. Especially impressive is his use of Chinese sources, many from the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, as well as books and articles by Chinese scholars and analysts and Chinese documents, some of them intended for internal distribution only (*neibu*). The principal theory he seeks to demonstrate is explicit in his title: weak alliances can be worse adversaries than those that are tightly integrated. He makes a convincing case that loose alliances, particularly those in which members are competing for leadership—for example, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC)—are harder to deal with and more likely to bring about regional conflicts. He notes also that ambiguity about the nature of alliance commitments can create comparable problems, as when Moscow and Beijing misread the meaning of the “course