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In Case You Missed It: Tibet Special, Part 2

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This second piece in our ongoing series highlighting "In Case You Missed It" readings on Tibet, is devoted to reflections by Charlene Makley, a member of Reed College's Anthropology Department. She was part of the same Boulder roundtable mentioned in our first post in the series, and she is the author of The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post Mao China, published last year by the University of California Press in cloth and paperback editions.

Having just returned from a year in Tibetan regions of the PRC, I am not completely versed on the most recent writings on Tibet and Sino-Tibetan relations. I can, though, recommend some key texts that have helped me navigate the historical complexities of the region.

For insightful analyses and cultural histories of Tibetans’ relations with Chinese and Westerners, I have greatly benefited from readings of Tsering Shakya's Dragon in the Land of the Snows (1999) and Donald Lopez’s Prisoners of Shangri-la (1998).

I have been surprised that Ronald Schwartz' book, Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising (1994), a close examination of the events leading up to Tibetan demonstrations and martial law in Lhasa in the late 1980s, has not been mentioned much when protests in the region have again been in the headlines. I met Schwartz in the summer of 2007 and he modestly remarked that his book was “dated,” but it seems to me that his analysis takes on new relevance now.

I also wish more people would look at the prolific writings of such exiled Tibetan dissidents as Jamyang Norbu (see his blog, “Shadow Tibet”). Not that I agree with everything he argues, but his controversial views and the responses to them from Tibetan and non-Tibetan readers are always extremely enlightening, highlighting as they do the current fault lines of debate and policy in the Tibet government in exile and among supporters of Tibetans.

Finally, Emily Yeh, who recently weighed in on this blog with her own suggestions about things to read, is one of the few scholars to write insightfully about the dilemmas of recent development efforts in Tibetan regions (with a particular focus on urban Lhasa) without bracketing essential issues of culture, identity and politics. See for example her article, "Property Relations in Tibet Since Decollectivisation and the Question of 'Fuzziness',” which appeared in Conservation and Society (2004).