



Tibetan Armed Resistance and the Cold War: Of Memories and Arrested Histories

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Having featured as an important component of the speaker's research focus for the last two decades or so, the presentation dwelt on a number of issues pertaining to the Tibetan citizen army, known as the ChushiGangdrug that fought through 1974 with covert support from the Tibetan exile government and the governments of India, Nepal, and the United States. The major thrust of Carole McGranahan's research and in effect, her presentation, was how little is known about the ChushiGangdrug, not just in the wider world but also within the Tibetan community. She found it intriguing how even close relatives tended to be oblivious about veteran fighters within their own homes. The veterans themselves, as she found through her research, tended to be unclear and confused about their involvement and participation in the resistance efforts against the Chinese PLA, primarily owing to the lack of discussion about this subject in the exile set up. The absence of discussion and acknowledgement of the ChushiGangdrug's contributions is seen as an important factor adding to the veteran fighters' dilemmas.

The speaker apprised the audience about her two primary research objectives – one, to study the ChushiGangdrug army and two, to probe why their history is unknown? According to her, there are a few possible reasons as to why the history of the ChushiGangdrug has not entered the annals of Tibetan history. One, because the ChushiGangdrug army did not win the war against the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). Two, the nature of the current Tibetan struggle, which is circumscribed by a non-violent agenda, limits the space for narration of a history of war. Three, since everything that the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) gets involved in becomes a secret affair, therefore, the Tibetan affair too would have

been relegated to the sidelines in order to cover up the CIA involvement. Four and most importantly, she saw an internal regional dimension to the issue. The ChushiGangdrug army was centred in the Kham region in eastern Tibet even though it had members from the other regions of Tibet (interestingly, she mentioned that, it also had fighters from Xinjiang and China). The people from Kham, known as Khampas had a reputation of being rough and tough and being on the periphery of the Lhasa government set-up. To accord them a historical role as national heroes would have been problematic for the Lhasa power centre.

The presentation sought to acquaint the audience with the political process of how past was set aside based on the understanding that now is not the time to tell the story of Tibet's violent past; the belief that that time will come in the future. She saw the Dalai Lama as an important agent in this process, sanctioning, legitimising and prohibiting what may or may not enter the exile discourse through his messages (both overt and subtle) and actions (through conferring meetings).

The speaker believes that the current period is the time of release. She deduced this from the fact that quite a number of books have been published on the subject, including documentaries (for eg. by children of veterans) and also many articles. However, she feels that "it is still quite not official". The key link, the Dalai Lama has yet to break his silence. And in the exile Tibetan community, where the Dalai Lama is held in so much reverence, including by the veterans themselves, only his word or acknowledgement would mean the ultimate release. To understand this one need not look too far. The case of Taiwan, which belonged to the category of 'not to be spoken' about until after the Dalai Lama visited the island in the 1990s.

Next, the speaker dealt at length with help of fascinating pictures on the formation, objectives and history of the ChushiGangdrug army. The civilian army was headed by AndrugtsangGompoTashi. They basically saw themselves as saviours of dharma. Later went on to see themselves as saviours of country too. This is reflected in their flag which flaunts a dharma sword and a battle sword.

1994 basically was the turning point in her involvement in Tibetan studies given the developments in the ChushiGangdrug-Taiwan issue. She was suddenly exposed to the intricacies of ChushiGangdrug-Tibet exile government relationship as the former went ahead

and signed an agreement with the Mongolian Tibet Affairs Commission (MTAC) and the latter objected and condemned the agreement.

Her research which lasted for about five years involved back and forth travel between Nepal, Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Majnu-ka-tilla. She translated a number of Tibetan documents of the ChushiGangdrug and conducted exhaustive oral interviews of veterans. Apart from historical approach, she also used participant observation method of living in the community since she is also an anthropologist.

The speaker informed that the Chinese troops' initial conduct in Tibet was relatively benign as they were following Mao Zedong's diktat to cultivate friendly relations with local Tibetans. However, things began to change in 1956 when the Chinese started burning monasteries, which basically led to the 'war'. The speaker also referred to the role of women in the resistance group, which however ceased by 1958.

The rest of the presentation discussed some of the achievements of the ChushiGangdrug (for eg. in the Dalai Lama's escape in 1959) and also the CIA's involvement in their training in great detail. As far as the latter was concerned, she argued that the CIA was basically helping the army for selfish reasons given its policy of containing China. To that end, it was using them to create 'nuisance and a thorn', as also to collect information. Between 1958 to 1964, the CIA trained several thousand Tibetans in its camp in Colorado. This site had previously been used as a World War II training camp of the 10th Mountain Division. After being trained in US, the individuals ended up in Mustang in Nepal, the headquarters of the ChushiGangdrug. From the early 1960s till 1974, raids into Tibet were carried out from Mustang. The CIA even parachuted troops into Tibet directly.

She had also conducted interviews of the CIA trainers, *gegens*. The presentation attempted to give a sense about the trainee-trainer relationship given that they were living together for years together during the training period. That even books about the Tibetan army were published by the trainers, eg. John Kenneth Knaus even though the subject is taboo for the CIA.

The speaker informed that the ChushiGangdrug also had an India branch which is now known as the Special Frontier Force (SFF) or Establishment 22. However, this too is an aspect that is little known or talked about even though they were involved in operation in Bangladesh in 1974.

While much of the early exile history is undocumented, the speaker found the ChushiGangdrug quite organised in documenting their stories and experiences. The speaker discussed how the members saw themselves as more than an army. She discussed a few of their drawings and booklets prepared at the time of their training in Colorado, few of which were disseminated inside Tibet. She mentioned that these booklets are currently a property of the CIA and hence, remain unpublished. The speaker also mentioned her interest, as an anthropologist, in the politics of lack of representation of these stories in Tibetan history textbooks.

Even though the military aspect of ChushiGangdrug came to an end in 1974, the organisation lived on in many countries till this day. She described that the surviving veterans live an anonymous life instead of as heroes. In her interview of about 100 veterans, she found that many of them tended to get emotional. For on the one hand, they fought in service of the Dharma, but at the same time, from a religious perspective, they felt sad about having committed the sin of killing. Hence, she did not find it surprising that many of the veterans became monks later. Those who had disrobed to join the ChushiGangdrug, and could not take their vows again, led strictly religious lives. The speaker could a singular fear in everybody's heart that the time for return to Tibet may not come.

Before concluding, the presentation briefly discussed some of the controversies concerning the ChushiGangdrug mainly pertaining to internal conflict. The agreement with Taiwan in 1994 led by Lithang Athar led to a split in the group as the Dalai Lama disagreed with the agreement. She mentioned that in 2014, there was a reconciliation of sorts between the children of these two camps.

2014 was also the year when 16 June, the founding anniversary of ChushiGangdrug was celebrated in Boston, US. The speaker relayed that many veterans are bitter about the fact that the larger Tibetan community do not accord the day its due importance. Before that, on 10 September 2010, incidentally, the day when her book on the subject was released, the CIA acknowledged the ChushiGangdrug by installing a plaque in Camp Hale, the training site, with Senator Mark Udall in attendance. She recalled how there had been no such plaque in Nepal or India.

Discussion

The first question pertained to the availability of Chinese statements or others objecting to CIA involvement. Any ChushiGangdrug fighters who probably were captured during combat mission by the PLA and are languishing in prisons in contemporary China? Does this issue form a part of the local discourse inside Tibet? The speaker responded in affirmative to the first two questions and added that many of the prisoners are out. To the third question, she mentioned that the people cannot talk about it openly.

The discussions also included comments. For instance, a comment was made about there being some sort of a problem with the Tibetan exile society in the context of it acknowledging certain people posthumously who have worked against Tibetan interests such as NgaboNgawangJigme and BapaPhuntsogWangyal. The speaker mentioned that it is a complex issue. A more direct question was asked about why the need to really talk about this episode of Tibetan history? Is there a feeling among Tibetan youngsters that they need a different, alternate framework? The speaker affirmed the second question in the context of increasing restriction on spaces to express oneself inside Tibet. In that she saw politics in Tibet getting harder. She shared that the new generation inside Tibet were increasingly resorting to expression through art forms such as music, poetry and so on. The current generation in Tibet, in her view, is in a period of greater awareness.

A methodological question was asked about the ease of access to information pertaining to the subject in India and US. While it was much easier to access information in the US, but sometimes, information was provided to her in convoluted forms. Such that, often whole sections of pages were blacked out. In the case of India, she narrated her experience of requesting files on Tibetan women in Calcutta in 1902 and even this was classified. She concluded that this was the reason why she does not see herself as a student of military or intelligence history; rather as a historian and anthropologist.

Report prepared by TsheringChonzom, Visiting Associate Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies.

About the Speaker

Carole McGranahan is an anthropologist and historian of Tibet, and an Associate Professor at the University of Colorado. At any given time, she would be working on one of the following projects: Tibet, British empire, and the Pangdatsang family; the CIA as an ethnographic

subject; contemporary US empire; the ongoing self-immolations in Tibet; the ChushiGangdrug resistance army; refugee citizenship in the Tibetan diaspora (Canada, India, Nepal, USA); and, anthropology as theoretical storytelling. She regularly teaches courses on anthropological theory, history and memory, ethnography, colonialism and empire, Tibet, Nepal, and the Himalayas. Her latest book is entitled *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Duke University Press, 2010). Currently, she is doing a Part Two of the *Arrested Histories/Chushi Gangdrug* project, this time focusing more solidly on the CIA as a key part of the spread of US Empire during the Cold War.

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