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“The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier: From United Front Promise to Ethnocultural Violence on a Tibetan Borderland of Early Maoist China.”

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When in 1949 the Chinese Communist Party “liberated” the ethnocultural frontier region known to Tibetans as Amdo, its goal was not just to build a state, but to create a nation—not just control, but transformation. Rather than immediately implement socialist reforms, it therefore pursued relatively moderate “United Front” policies meant to “gradually” persuade Tibetans and Amdo’s other non-Han inhabitants of their membership in the new Chinese nation. At the outset of 1958’s Great Leap Forward, however, United Front gradualism was jettisoned in favor of rapid collectivization. This led to large-scale rebellion, overwhelming state repression, and widespread famine. Rather than a “voluntary” and “organic” transformation, Amdo was incorporated through the widespread and often indiscriminate deployment of state violence. In this talk, Benno Weiner discusses the Communist Party’s United Front strategy in Amdo, the 1958 Amdo Rebellion, and ways in which the violence of 1958 and its aftermath continue to cloud efforts to integrate Tibetans into the modern Chinese nation-state.