The first indication that we are in different territory with this autobiography is suggested in the listing of its authors. For the first author of the book subtitled *The Autobiography of Tashi Tsering* is listed as Melvyn Goldstein rather than Tashi Tsering himself; the second author is William Siebenschuh, and the third is Tashi Tsering. Mel Goldstein has long been known as something of an enigma within Tibetan Studies: he was able to study in Tibet when few other Western scholars could; he has dared to be critical of the Tibetan government-in-exile; and he has frequently been accused of harboring pro-Chinese sentiments. (When I first entered the field and moved 30 miles away from Goldstein in Cleveland, a friend who is an established anthropologist of Tibetan culture warned me to stay away from him, intimating that he was no friend of Tibetans and no friend of ours.) It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Goldstein would break from the established tradition of emphasizing Tibetan authorship in such autobiographies in English and put his own name first, as Tashi Tsering’s primary interviewer. The second author, William Siebenschuh, is a scholar of English biography and autobiography who was enlisted in the project when Goldstein could not finish it. That the subject and narrator of the book, Tashi Tsering, appears only third in the list of authors may be an accident of the English alphabet; it is also indicative of the many ways that this book works against prevailing norms of Tibetan self-presentation. Tashi Tsering’s life story as told in *The Struggle for Modern Tibet* is a dramatic intervention in Tibetan self-presentations in English, working against stereotypes, assumptions, and prevailing norms in several ways. In the following analysis, I outline a number of these departures and suggest what they mean for representations of Tibetans in the West.
In many of the autobiographies encountered so far, the subject is often presented as having to be coaxed to tell his or her story. (Adhe is an exception to this.) Aware of the namtar tradition that focuses on exemplary and enlightened beings, raised in a cultural milieu that does not emphasize the importance of individuality in a Western sense, many Tibetan autobiographers are represented as resisting the request to tell their story. Not so with Tashi. As Goldstein recounts:

On one of my trips [to Tibet], Tashi surprised me by asking if I could help him publish a book about his life. He thought foreigners needed to know about common Tibetans—that is, Tibetans who were not aristocrats or monastic prelates or incarnate lamas. He felt his life story could play a useful role in assisting both Westerners and young Tibetans born in exile to understand the real—the non-Shangri-la—Tibet.1

While not the first to want to work against the Shangri-La myth (Tsering Shakya writes of a similar desire in his introduction to Palden Gyatso’s autobiography), Tashi Tsering tells a story unique in the genre. Having moved into exile in India in 1957, shifted to the United States to study in the 1960s, Tashi Tsering actually abandons his scholarship, his small Tibetan community in Seattle (including his wife), and his exile status to return to Chinese-occupied Tibet in the hopes that he might be able to work on behalf of ordinary Tibetans there: “The more I thought about it, the surer I became that the Chinese invasion of Tibet provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Tibetans and that I wanted to become part of the process of change.”2 Instead of devotedly following the path and the wishes of the Dalai Lama, Tashi feels so determined to follow this path that he will not even be dissuaded by Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama’s brother, with whom he had worked in India and for whom he had collected the stories of recent refugees in India in 1959. Tashi’s acute sense of inequities within the traditional Tibetan system drives him to seek a different path and marks yet another way that his story departs from others offered by Tibetans in English.

Palden Gyatso’s autobiography, we might recall, begins with the enigmatic sentence, “I was born beneath a rainbow.”3 Tashi Tsering’s story has quite a different beginning but echoes Palden’s accounts of life in prison: Tashi’s name is called; he describes himself as “weak with fear;” he steps forward to receive a beating. Then he is “lashed across [his] bare buttocks with long thin switches” until his skin splits open.4 But instead of recounting brutal treatment by Chinese oppressors, Tashi relates a recurring nightmare he has about a beating he received at the hands of another Tibetan—the