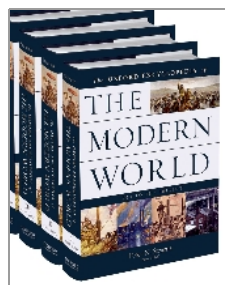


Oxford Reference



Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World

Edited by Peter N. Stearns

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Print ISBN-13: 9780195176322

Current Online Version: 2012

Print Publication Date: 2008

Published to Oxford Reference: 2008

eISBN: 9780195341126

Tibet.

Tibet, as described here, refers to the whole of the Tibetan cultural region and not merely to the political state based for centuries in Central Tibet, with its capital at Lhasa. In simple terms, Tibetan culture is delineated by those who speak the Tibetan group of languages or dialects and practice Tibetan Buddhism or the Bon religion. The traditional bounds of Tibetan culture are nearly coterminous with the Tibetan plateau. Often called the roof of the world because of the high altitude (averaging some 15,000 feet), Tibet is the origin of Asia's mightiest rivers. Tibet's 6 million inhabitants live clustered mostly in the river valleys spread across a territory the size of western Europe. The majority of Tibetans live outside of Central Tibet in the northeastern (Amdo) and eastern (Kham) Tibetan regions bordering the Chinese cultural area.

Modern Tibetan history was shaped by the political predominance of the Gelukpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, whose leadership generally held power from 1642 until 1959. Central Tibetan political power rested in the office of the Dalai Lama as leader of a hierocratic religio-political system. From 1750, representatives of the Qing dynasty (which ruled China) supported Tibetan political stability, with troops when necessary. Power was exercised through a dual system of religious and noble officials, though the four-member Tibetan cabinet was dominated by noble families. Religious administrators controlled huge monastic estates that supported the Potala Palace and the three large monastic universities surrounding Lhasa, while nobility staffed regional districts that enforced the legal system.

Most Central Tibetans were commoners bound to the land, with duties to government and monastic estates. Taxes were paid in kind to the district leaders, while compulsory labor was owed government officials. However, in Kham and Amdo independent clans, monastic strongholds, and more ancient Tibetan nobility accounted for the wide range of polities that fell sometimes under Chinese sway but mostly ruled themselves. The practice of polyandry and polygamy in Tibet was an outgrowth of traditions to keep family property undivided. Women could also inherit a family's prerogatives and property, though this was rare, and married women owned their own property.

The interest and attention of the Qing dynasty brought tremendous wealth to Tibet through direct patronage of monasteries and burgeoning trade. This led to a vast growth in the number of monasteries and monk inhabitants,



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Tibet. Potala Palace, Lhasa, 1939. AP Images

especially in the borderlands, and it may also have been responsible for making eastern Tibet the location of the most important intellectual developments of modern Tibetan history.

Tibet's growing wealth attracted the attention of powers south of the Himalayas. By the late eighteenth century, British envoys from India pursued the possibility of trade, and Nepal actually invaded Tibet in 1788 and 1791–1792. Though the Qing army drove the Nepalese out of Tibet in 1792, a Nepalese invasion forced Tibet to pay an indemnity and annual tribute after 1856. In 1841–1842, Tibet successfully defended its southwestern borders without Qing assistance, but Lhasa was forced to recognize the annexation of Ladakh to Jammu and Kashmir. British demands for free trade and border markets with Tibet escalated into the British invasion of 1904. This foreign incursion prompted a strong response from Chinese nationalists, who violated centuries of Manchu traditions by attempting to carry out colonialist strategies in Kham and Central Tibet.

The Chinese revolution disrupted China's ability to interfere with Central Tibet, which enjoyed *de facto* independence from 1913 to 1950—at first under the leadership of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thupten Gyatso (1876–1933). In the early twentieth century, Amdo was ruled by Muslim Chinese warlords, while Kham was divided between the armies of Central Tibet and Chinese warlords. Under the thirteenth Dalai Lama, the Central Tibetan administration was reformed, revenues were centralized, and a standing army was formed. In this interim, the Central Tibetan government declined to join international organizations or alliances. During World War II the government maintained neutrality and refused to permit armaments to be transported from India to Republican China after the Japanese severed the Burma Road. Only as Communist success seemed possible, in 1948, did the Tibetans start to reach out to world governments for recognition and assistance. But by 1950, when the People's Liberation Army was camped on the Tibetan marches in Kham, no state was willing to back Tibet's claim to independence.

Thus in 1951 captured Tibetan officials signed the 17-Point Agreement with the Chinese Communists, relinquishing Tibet's claim to independence but guaranteeing that neither Central Tibet's existing political system and religious practices nor income of the monasteries would be altered. Within the decade, as the Chinese built roads, moved in forces, and in particular altered the existing status quo in Kham and Amdo, a Tibetan resistance gradually grew. By 1959 affairs had come to a head, and the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), with some 80,000 Tibetans, fled after an aborted uprising in Lhasa. At this point the Chinese disregarded the agreement, and the tragedies affecting the rest of Tibet and China were visited upon Central Tibet: the outright suppression of resistance, the incrimination of those from the upper class, the man-made disaster of the Great Leap Forward, and the horrors of the Cultural Revolution. From 1959 to 1978 at least half a million Tibetans perished because of Chinese actions.

The oppression started to lift only in 1980 when Communist Party officials were appalled at conditions there and recommended remedial action. Liberalization followed, but as the international campaign for Tibet gained strength, Tibetan nationalism was revived. Authorities responded to demonstrations from 1987 to 1989 by imposing martial law. Though martial law was lifted in 1990, Chinese authorities have since kept much closer control of Tibetan dissent and even the free practice of religion. This crackdown is because religion is a rallying point for Tibetan nationalism and because the monastic community, especially nuns, actively supports the movement to free Tibet from Chinese control. The Chinese campaign to “Develop the West” seeks to combine economic growth and Chinese immigration as dual

tools to finally integrate Tibet with China proper.

[See also BORDERS AND BORDERLANDS, *SUBENTRY* EAST ASIA; and CHINA, *SUBENTRY* AUTONOMOUS REGIONS.]

The Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lamas are understood by Tibetans to be manifestations of the bodhisattva of compassion, Chenresig. The institution of the Dalai Lama was based on one of the features unique to the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism: the ability of enlightened masters (called *lamas*) to choose their rebirths and their disciples to find and train them from a very young age. The reincarnation series associated with the Dalai Lama dates back to the lifetime of the founder of the Gelukpa tradition, Tsongkhapa Lozang Drakpa (1357–1419), whose disciple Gendun Drupa (1391–1474) is now recognized as the first of the series.

The actual title “Dalai Lama” was first bestowed on the third Dalai Lama, Sönam Gyatso (1543–1588), by the Mongol Altan Khan in 1578. The first to hold political power over Tibet, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso (1617–1682), was granted this dominion in 1642 by his devoted Mongol disciple Gushri Khan, who led a series of successful attacks across the Tibetan plateau against the enemies of the Gelukpa tradition. Gushri Khan's descendants retained the nominal status of king of Tibet, but real power remained until 1705 in the hands of the fifth Dalai Lama and, after his death, his regent.

The fifth Dalai Lama's reign marked a high point in the reintegration of the Tibetan cultural territory that had been fragmented since the Tibetan Empire (600–842), as well as a literary flowering that attempted to summarize the collected knowledge of Tibet in the fields of medicine, astrology, and history according the Gelukpa interpretation. The thirteenth and the fourteenth Dalai Lamas are two of the most long-lived and influential of this incarnation series.

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GRAY TUTTLE

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