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The Panchen Lama Fact Sheet

- The Panchen Lamas (Great Scholars) are the second-most important religious leaders in Tibetan Buddhism, after the Dalai Lamas. They are reincarnating religious leaders who traditionally oversee Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse, Tibet.
- The first Panchen Lama was the abbot of Tashi Lhunpo and the tutor of the fifth Dalai Lama. In 1385, the fifth Dalai Lama recognized his tutor with this title.
- Since then, the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama have been responsible for recognizing and educating the other's reincarnation. They are traditionally referred to as the Sun and Moon, respectively, with the Dalai Lama having both spiritual and sovereign responsibilities and the Panchen Lama having spiritual responsibilities.
- The 10th Panchen Lama, Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen (1938–1989), initially maintained good relations with the Communist Chinese and promoted the welfare of the Tibetan people. In 1962, he petitioned the Chinese government to change its policies toward the Tibetans, and he was later imprisoned. After his release in 1975, he advocated good relationships with the Chinese while encouraging Tibetans to "be for the Tibetan cause." He died in Tibet in 1989.
- The 11th Panchen Lama, Gedun Choekyi Nyima, was born April 25, 1989, in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. In May 1995, he and his family disappeared, and in May 1996 the Chinese government stated it was holding them in protective custody. No international agencies or human rights organizations have been allowed to visit them.
- In November 1995, the Chinese government nominated and selected its own 11th Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu. He grew up mainly in Beijing and has been traveling recently in Tibetan regions.
- On October 10, 2002, the US Congress unanimously passed House Resolution 410, which states that then Chinese vice president Hu Jintao "should be made aware of congressional concern for the Panchen Lama and the need to resolve the situation in Tibet through dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives." It also requests that the Chinese government release the Panchen Lama and allow him to oversee Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Tibet and that it work with the Dalai Lama or his representatives to negotiate a solution for "genuine autonomy that respects the rights of all Tibetans."
- The Panchen Lama–Tashi Lhunpo Project (<http://www.honorpanchenlama.org/>) is 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Montrose, California, that is under the direction of Khen Rinpoche Geshe Kachen Lobzang Tsetan. Its mission is "to secure the traditions of Tashi Lhunpo, in anticipation of the release and rightful return of the Panchen Lama to his seat at this great scholastic monastery."

Sources: Bill Text 107th Congress (2001-2002) search, Library of Congress. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c107:1:./temp/~c107OMilUa::>; Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. <http://www.tashilhunpo.org/>; *The Panchen Lama*. Northern Arizona University. <http://oak.ucc.nau.edu/wittke/Tibet/Panchen.html>; Jacobs, A. (2011, August 11). China's Chosen Lama Visits Monastery Town. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/12/world/asia/12lama.html>; Panchen Lama–Tashi Lhunpo Project. <http://www.honorpanchenlama.org/mission/>.