



Offering Traditional Buddhist Teachings to Enrich Our Contemporary Lives

Tibetan History Fact Sheet

Early History

- King Nyatri Tsenpo founds the Yarlung Dynasty in central Tibet, circa 600.
- King Songtsen Gampo (r. 630–649) expands the kingdom into northern India and threatens China. Chinese princess Wencheng is married to Songtsen Gampo to forge an alliance, and she and his Nepali wife are credited with creating support for Buddhism in the Tibetan court.
- By the reign of King Trisong Detsen (755–797), Tibetan influence has spread over Turkestan, northern Pakistan, Nepal, India, and Gansu and Sichuan Provinces in China. Buddhism takes hold with the establishment of Samye Monastery in central Tibet's Yarlung Valley.
- In the early 800s, royal support for institutional Buddhism results in opposition and regicides, and the state collapses in 842. Smaller kingdoms, including Guge in western Tibet, form.
- As Buddhism wanes in the 11th century in other parts of Asia, it grows in Tibet.
- In 1239, the Mongols invade Tibet and eventually adopt Tibetan Buddhism as their state religion. They appoint a Tibetan from the Sakya Buddhist lineage to oversee Tibet. When China's Yuan Dynasty (which formed when the Mongols took over China) falls in 1368, Tibet and China gain independence. Several kingdoms rule Tibet over the next couple hundred years. Other Tibetan Buddhist sects form.
- The Gelugpa (also "Gelukpa") Buddhist sect's system of recognizing Dalai Lamas begins in the 16th century, and the sect maintains an alliance with the Mongols. Skirmishes between the sects ensue until the fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) becomes the spiritual and sovereign leader of a unified Tibet. Construction of monastic buildings, including the Potala Palace in Lhasa, flourishes.
- Following events within Tibet and China, China's Qing Dynasty sees an opportunity to send a military expedition to Tibet in the early 1700s and makes it a protectorate.
- In 1788, Tibet bans foreigners from entering the country. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Britain and Russia vie to enter Tibet and form trade relationships.

Twentieth-Century History

- In 1903, the British invade, killing a thousand Tibetans before procuring a trade agreement with Tibet, which causes China to invade in protest. Britain and China sign an agreement over Tibetan trade. The 13th Dalai Lama flees Tibet during both invasions.
- The Qing Dynasty falls in 1911, and the 13th Dalai Lama assumes leadership of Tibet. He attempts to modernize the country, but conservatives oppose his efforts. The ninth Panchen Lama flees in a dispute over the autonomy of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery.
- On October 7, 1950, the army of the newly formed People's Republic of China invades Tibet. Tibet's small army is unable to defend the country, and appeals to the United Nations to condemn China are ineffective. The 14th Dalai Lama, then 15 years old, is enthroned.

- The 17-Point Agreement, which promises to retain the existing political system in Tibet, is ratified by the Chinese in 1951 without Tibetan consent. Tibetan leadership tries to work within the agreement, but China's growing occupation army and its effect on resources result in uprisings over the next eight years. The United States' CIA assists Tibetan fighters.
- On March 17, 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama leaves Tibet, amid protests over concerns that the Chinese are going to kidnap him. He arrives in India two weeks later, eventually setting up a government in exile in Dharamsala. The Chinese army bombs Lhasa, killing hundreds, possibly more.
- In the early 1960s, the Chinese abolish the Tibetan government and institute socialist reforms on monastics and aristocrats. In 1962, the 10th Panchen Lama, who remained in Tibet, petitions the Chinese government to change its policies toward the Tibetans; he is later imprisoned.
- In July 1966, the Cultural Revolution reaches Lhasa, and Chinese Red Guards and Chinese-educated Tibetan youths destroy religious sites. Farms are turned into collective communes, and Tibetans are forced to denounce the Dalai Lama.
- In 1972, religious restrictions are lifted. In 1975, foreign reporters are allowed into Tibet and report on the destruction. The CIA stops its program in Tibet.
- Mao Zedong dies in 1976, and policies toward Tibet soften. The Panchen Lama is released from prison. The Chinese government invites the Dalai Lama to return (he does not). His emissaries report that 1.2 million Tibetans were killed, 6,254 monasteries and nunneries were destroyed, two-thirds of Tibet has been absorbed into neighboring Chinese provinces, 100,000 Tibetans are in labor camps, and heavy deforestation had occurred. China's Deng Xiaoping also sends a fact-finding mission, and its similar findings initiate a six-point plan for improvements.
- In the 1980s, the Chinese government encourages Han Chinese to move to Tibet to modernize it. Tourism begins, although access is denied during political uprisings and reprisals.
- In 1989, the 14th Dalai Lama receives the Nobel Peace Prize. The 10th Panchen Lama dies.
- In the 1990s, the Tibetans recognize the 11th Panchen Lama. The Chinese government takes him and his family in custody and selects its own Panchen Lama.

Twenty-First Century History

- In 2007, a railway between Beijing and Lhasa opens.
- In March, 2011, the Tibetan government in exile accepts the Dalai Lama's retirement from political responsibilities.
- The Chinese government has indicated that it has authority over the Dalai Lama's next reincarnation. In response, on September 4, 2011, the Dalai Lama states that when he is 90, he will consult monastics and the public on whether the reincarnation of Dalai Lamas should continue and if the 15th Dalai Lama should be recognized. If the system continues, he will leave "clear, written instructions" about his next rebirth.
- Since 2009, there have been 23 self-immolations by Tibetan monastics in Tibet and China.

Sources: Mayhew, B., Kelly, R., & Bellezza, J. V. (2008). *Tibet*. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet; International Campaign for Tibet. (2012, Winter). "An Excerpt from His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's Statement on the Issue of His Reincarnation." *Tibet Press Watch; Self-immolation fact sheet*. Campaign for Tibet. <http://www.savetibet.org/resource-center/maps-data-fact-sheets/self-immolation-fact-sheet>.