

Fighting for a Free Tibet

IN 1937, A GROUP OF BUDDHIST MONKS TRAVELED to a small village in what is now the Qinghai Province of China. They came to see a two-year-old boy named Lhamo Dondrup, the son of poor parents who eked out a living by farming a small plot of land. The monks showed the child several objects. They asked him which of the objects belonged to him. Lhamo Dondrup pointed to a string of prayer beads, a walking stick, and a drum. The monks were relieved. After an exhausting search, they had finally found what they were looking for. Little Lhamo Dondrup, they believed, was the new Dalai Lama, the political and spiritual leader of the Asian country of Tibet.

The religion of Tibetan Buddhism teaches that, after death, humans are reincarnated, or reborn as different beings. Several years before the monks' quest, Thubten Gyatso, the thirteenth

Opposite: Buildings cling to the hillsides in the rugged mountains of Tibet.

As a young boy, Tenzin Gyatso spoke a dialect, or version, of Chinese. He did not learn Tibetan until later.



Dalai Lama had died. The monks had since been scouring the countryside looking for his next incarnation. Their search eventually led them to Lhamo Dondrup's village. The boy had certain physical characteristics—such as upward-slanting eyes and large ears—that the monks expected a Dalai Lama to have. But only after the boy picked out the personal possessions of the deceased Dalai Lama were they sure that he was the reincarnation of their former leader.

Living in Exile

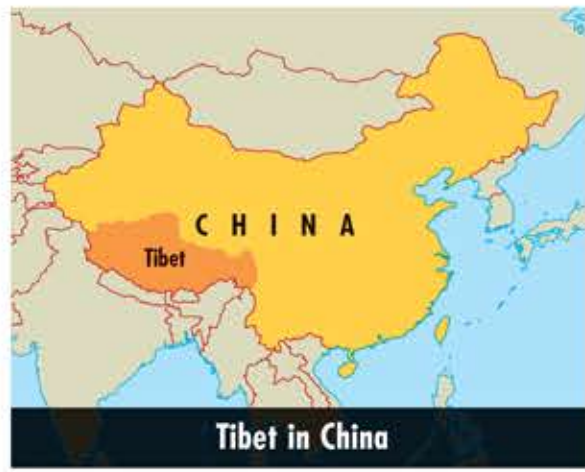
When Lhamo Dondrup was four, he was taken to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. At a ceremony at the Potala Palace, he received the name Tenzin Gyatso. In the years that followed, he received rigorous training to prepare him for the impor-

tant role he would soon take on. His tutors taught him about logic, medicine, and Tibetan art and culture. He also studied Buddhist religious practices and philosophy.

Usually, a Dalai Lama takes over leadership of Tibet when he turns eighteen. But Tenzin Gyatso received power over the country in 1950, when he was just fifteen years old. Tibet was in turmoil. Late that year, soldiers from China, Tibet's neighbor to the north and east, had crossed the border into Tibet. By the next year, Chinese forces had taken over Lhasa. The Chinese government declared that Tibet was not an independent nation. It said that Tibet was now and always had been part of China.

Chinese troops march toward the Tibetan border in 1950.





The new Dalai Lama attempted to engage China in peace talks, with little success. At the same time, the Tibetan people became increasingly resentful of the Chinese presence in their homeland. After years of resistance, they staged a full-scale rebellion in 1959, which the Chinese army quickly put down. Knowing his life was in danger,

the Dalai Lama, disguised as a soldier, fled from Tibet. He crossed the Himalaya mountain chain into India. There, he established a Tibetan government in exile in the town of Dharamsala.

Building Support

For decades, the Dalai Lama has fought to free Tibetans from Chinese rule. He initially demanded that Tibet receive its full independence. But in 1979 he moderated his position. Since then, he has advocated what he calls the “middle way.” The Dalai Lama is now willing to allow Tibet to be part of China, as long as Tibet’s religion, culture, and language are protected.

The Dalai Lama is a major world figure. Here, he greets a crowd in Frankfurt, Germany.



The Dalai Lama has proven himself extremely skilled at promoting this cause, especially to people in North America and Europe. Lecturing widely and visiting world leaders, he became famous for his calm demeanor, wise words, and charismatic personality. For his efforts to find a nonviolent solution to the conflict between Tibet and China, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

Worldwide, the Dalai Lama has become an esteemed figure, one of the world's most beloved spiritual leaders. His widespread popularity was particularly evident in the outpouring of affection for him in 2015 on his eightieth birthday. His birthday was celebrated at many events in different countries. One of the

The Dalai Lama takes part in one of his many eightieth birthday celebrations at an event in California.



largest was held in New York City on July 11, with more than fifteen thousand people crowding into an auditorium to see him. With his round glasses and kind smile, the Dalai Lama sat quietly on the stage as a parade of speakers paid tribute to him. "Very few other people have made such a positive contribution to humanity as His Holiness with the unwavering message of compassion," said Valerie Jarrett, a senior advisor to President Barack Obama. When she called him "an extraordinary leader, a good man, a man with amazing grace," the audience burst into applause.

Lhasa has been the religious center of Tibet since the ninth century CE. Its name means "home of the gods."

Banned in His Native Land

In Tibet, however, there were no public celebrations. The streets, in fact, were full of soldiers and police determined to put an end to any acknowledgment of the birthday or even of the Dalai Lama himself. Today, any Tibetan who speaks

Timeline

TIBETAN HISTORY

Legendary figure Nyatri Tsenpo becomes the first king of Tibet.	127 BCE
Songtsen Gampo unifies Tibet and establishes the first Buddhist temples there.	600s CE
Tibet briefly takes control of the Chinese capital of Chang'an (now Xi'an).	700s
The Tibetan kingdom disbands after the assassination of King Lang Darma.	840s
Mongol forces invade Tibet.	1240
Ngawang Lozang Gyatso, the fifth Dalai Lama, builds the Potala Palace.	1600s

WORLD HISTORY

ca. 2500 BCE	The Egyptians build the pyramids and the Sphinx in Giza.
ca. 563 BCE	The Buddha is born in India.
313 CE	The Roman emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity.
610	The Prophet Muhammad begins preaching a new religion called Islam.
1054	The Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic) Churches break apart.
1095	The Crusades begin.
1215	King John seals the Magna Carta.
1300s	The Renaissance begins in Italy.
1347	The plague sweeps through Europe.
1453	Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople, conquering the Byzantine Empire.
1492	Columbus arrives in North America.
1500s	Reformers break away from the Catholic Church, and Protestantism is born.
1776	The U.S. Declaration of Independence is signed.
1789	The French Revolution begins.
1865	The American Civil War ends.
1879	The first practical lightbulb is invented.

TIBETAN HISTORY

British soldiers enter Tibet; Tibetan leaders sign a trade agreement.	1904
Chinese troops invade Tibet.	1910
Tibet declares its political independence.	1913
Chinese troops enter Tibet.	1950
China gains control over Tibet with the Seventeen Point Agreement.	1951
The Dalai Lama escapes to India and establishes the Tibetan government in exile.	1959
China establishes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).	1965
Most Tibetan monasteries are destroyed during China's Cultural Revolution.	1960s–1970s
The Dalai Lama is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.	1989
The eleventh Panchen Lama is detained by Chinese authorities and disappears.	1995
A railway connecting Beijing in China and Lhasa in Tibet is completed.	2006
The Dalai Lama transfers his political responsibilities to Sikyong Lobsang Sangay.	2011
Tibetans around the world celebrate the Dalai Lama's eightieth birthday.	2015

WORLD HISTORY

1914	World War I begins.
1917	The Bolshevik Revolution brings communism to Russia.
1929	A worldwide economic depression begins.
1939	World War II begins.
1945	World War II ends.
1969	Humans land on the Moon.
1975	The Vietnam War ends.
1989	The Berlin Wall is torn down as communism crumbles in Eastern Europe.
1991	The Soviet Union breaks into separate states.
2001	Terrorists attack the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon near Washington, D.C.
2004	A tsunami in the Indian Ocean destroys coastlines in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.
2008	The United States elects its first African American president.