

# Tibetan buddhism and the influence of china history essay



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Tibet has been oppressed and dominated by China throughout the history of the region. For some reason the Tibetan people have never seemed to be able to stand free from the influence of China, even dating back to the first recorded interactions between the Mongols and Tibetans. I feel that this domination by China of the Tibetan region has a lot to do with the fact that the pacifist religious beliefs of Tibetan Buddhists have become interwoven into the regions political, cultural, and ideological landscape. In my opinion, Tibetan Buddhism has not grown or changed throughout the centuries because of this Chinese oppression and these pacifist beliefs. While there were times it appeared as though Tibet would escape Chinese domination, the region has been constantly oppressed throughout its history.

In my opinion, the main reason why Tibetan Buddhism, and Tibet as a whole, has not been able to evolve as a region is due to the deep intermingling of religion within the Tibetan culture and society that clash with Chinese communist principles. Because of these principles, the Chinese government has consistently harassed Tibet. "Tibet is a religious society and Tibetan Buddhism is integral to its identity. Many Tibetan religious practices are suppressed and banned. China requires that religious belief is practiced in a way that accepts the leadership of the Party and the government above all else. [2]" Since Tibetans see the Dalai Lama as their religious and political leader; this has caused major conflict with China. This conflict has caused the destruction of not only a country, but also a culture, and a religion, Tibetan Buddhism. Just since the latest "invasion of Tibet began in 1949. Chinese occupation has resulted in the death of over one million Tibetans, the

destruction of over 6, 000 monasteries, nunneries and temples, and the imprisonment and torture of thousands of Tibetans. [3]"

### Buddhism arrives in Tibet

Buddhism arrived in Tibet from India during the 8th century, at the invitation of the Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen, who invited two Buddhist masters to Tibet and had important Buddhist texts translated into Tibetan. A century later, after the breakup of the Tibetan Empire, Tibet divided and was ruled by kings who in turn, gave the Lamas, the clergy of Tibetan Buddhism, land for their monasteries and the ability to gather offerings from the people. By the 14th century, the clergy of the monasteries had become more powerful than the kings. The kings became extinct and the country, and for all practical purposes was ruled by the Buddhist priests.

Over the next few centuries, the exchange of power over Tibet and modern day China volleyed back and forth between Mongol and Chinese Dynasties. Even up until the 17th century under the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Tibet was ruled indirectly through the Tibetan noblemen. With this introduction of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, this was the beginning of mixing religion and power into the culture and politics of the region. Through the monasteries, Lamas gained support and outlasted the political powers century after century. This is key, because it shows that the religious Lamas have had the " control" longer than any other entity in Tibet.

### The Chinese stake their claim to Tibet

Much of the controversy begins at the point in history when the Mongol Empire took over what is today China and Tibet, and two sides emerged. The Chinese government claims this to be one of the events, which the Chinese base their right to claim the rule of Tibet. Whereas, Tibetan historians argue that China and Tibet remained two separate units within the Mongol Empire, China claims Tibet has always been part of China since the time of the Mongol Empire.

The first documented contact between the Tibetans and the Mongol Empire, today's Republic of China, occurred with Genghis Khan and the invasion of Tibet in the 13th Century. After the death of Genghis Khan, Tibet stopped sending tribute which led to a second Mongol invasion and ultimately to the submission of almost all Tibetan states. Under the rule of Kublai Khan, a grandson of Genghis Khan, still in the 13th century, both the Chinese and Tibetan legal and administrative systems were left intact.

The Dalai Lama: Spiritual and political leader, brings hope to the people of Tibet

Even though the birth of the Dalai Lama, who is believed to be reincarnation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the religious leader of the "Yellow Hat" sect of Tibetan Buddhism, began in the 14th century with first of the Dalai Lamas, the political reign of the Dalai Lama did not officially begin until the 17th century. Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, the 5th Dalai Lama, granted political and religious status in Tibet by the Qing Emperor, and became the first to wield political and religious power over central Tibet. Gyatso is frequently referred to as the "Great Fifth Dalai Lama." Chinese historians

say that Tibet became a territory of the Qing dynasty by 1760; never mind that Tibet has already been under China's rule for four centuries. As for the Tibetan view, that proposes, "Tibet was never subject to the rule of the Yuan or Qing emperors of China." Furthermore, in a treaty signed in 1856 with Nepal, Tibet agreed to "regard the Chinese Emperor as heretofore with respect.[7]" This makes you wonder whether the Fifth Dalai Lama was actually the first to rule Tibet, or just the first time an outside party acknowledged the leader as more than a religious figure.

### China's control threatened as Tibet hopes for freedom

The influx of European countries into Tibet, by both Britain and Russia, grabbed the attention of China. China did not want to have a "buffer" country, right on their border that could so easily influence Tibet. Instead of having a liability, China then used their history with Tibet to claim it as part of China.

It seems that Tibetan control was to have continued uncontested until soon after the British invasion early in the 20th century, which alarmed the Chinese rulers. Competing for supremacy in Central Asia with the Russians, the British attempted to force a trading agreement to prevent Tibetans from establishing a relationship with the Russians. China asserted that they were the authority over Tibet, the first clear statement of such a claim.

Throughout the "Convention between Great Britain and Russia (1907)" Britain and Russia agreed that in "conformity with the admitted principle of the suzerainty of China over Tibet," both nations "engage not to enter into

negotiations with Tibet except through the intermediary of the Chinese Government. [12]"

### De facto independence

While China focused its attention elsewhere with a civil war and World War II, Tibet enjoyed a period of independence referred to as the "de facto independence," defined by dictionary.com meaning, "actually existing, especially when without lawful authority." Some Chinese sources argue that Tibet was still part of China throughout this period, and Tibet continued to have very limited contacts, diplomatic or recreational, with the rest of the world. In 1949, with the Chinese Communist Party coming to power, the "de facto independence" period Tibet was becoming accustomed to was ending.

That period of de facto independence was important because it shows that Tibet had sustained itself without the attention of Chinese rule.

### The People's Republic of China: the modern Chinese influence on Tibet

"From the beginning, it was obvious that incorporating Tibet into Communist China would bring two opposite social systems face-to-face. [7]" The People's Republic of China was established in 1949, with the China Communist Party, officially atheist, at its helm. The leader of The People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong, was famously hostile towards religion and was quick to assert his power to all parts of China, including Tibet. During the early years of Communism in China, houses of worship, including pagodas, temples, mosques, and churches, were converted into non-religious buildings for secular use; even though the government did allow a limited degree of

religious freedom, extended only to state-approved religious organizations. There are five recognized religions by the state, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Although Buddhism and Communism disagree on many philosophical points, Buddhism in China has been under state control for most of its history, and have submitted to communist rule. " Some restrictions of Tibetan Buddhism are due to controversies about its hierarchy. [13]"

### The Seventeen Point scam and the Cultural Revolution in Tibet

In 1951, negotiations in Beijing between Tibetan representatives and the Chinese government resulted in the widely disputed " Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet," affirming Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. The signing of the " Seventeen Point Agreement," has been contested and considered invalid by the Tibetan exile community. Suggesting, " China had 20, 000 troops at the Tibetan border when it ordered Tibet to send representatives to Beijing to negotiate a treaty. The treaty was written by China, and Tibetan representatives were not allowed to suggest any alterations. [17]" The People's Republic of China took full control of Tibet in 1959.

As China's military entered Tibet, they established public schools, to replace education in the monasteries, and they provided running water and electrical systems in Lhasa, the capitol of Tibet. By 1957, Tibetan forces teaming up with the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), sought to fight back against the Chinese military. Eventually the resistance crumbled, and many of resistance members were never to be heard from again; it was widely

theorized that they were captured and killed. In 1959, after the failed uprising, the 14th and current Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, who was not only the spiritual leader, but also the sovereign of Tibet, fled to Dharamsala, India for fear of assassination. The Dalai Lama, essentially the ruler of Tibet, ceded temporal power to an elected government-in-exile. He still has attempted to negotiate with the Chinese authorities for greater independence and religious freedom for Tibet. Shortly after, the Cultural Revolution swept across China and into Tibet in China's attempt to solidify the Communist hold over both regions leading to a policy of elimination of religions. " Especially during the Cultural Revolution many monasteries were destroyed and many monks and laypeople killed. [13]"

The Silk Glove: China's " Freedom of Religion?"

" The death of Mao Zedong and the end of Cultural Revolution ushered in a period of liberalization and open-door policy. The new Chinese leadership took a bold step of reaching out to the Tibetan leadership in exile. [21]" The 1978 Constitution of the People's Republic of China was mended to include " freedom of religion," but not without some inquisitive glances from the rest of the world. " There has been a mixed reaction to the insertion of the word 'religion' in the Constitution of the Peoples Republic of China. Does it indicate a growing acceptance of Religious freedom or is it another sign of an effort to exercise State control? [14]" Nevertheless, by the mid-80's, temples and mosques were reinstated and it seemed, to the rest of the world, that the iron hand of China had put on a silk glove. " Despite its official policy of respect for the freedom of religion, China's overarching concern is ensuring the adaption of religion in order to 'safeguard the security, honor and <https://assignbuster.com/tibetan-buddhism-and-the-influence-of-china-history-essay/>



interests of the motherland', a requirement which renders the freedom of religion illusory. [2]" So it seems that the People's Republic of China's "freedom of religion" was just a ploy to divert blame elsewhere. Considering the constitution, which "forbids religious practices that cause 'disruption' or 'harm' to society [13]" it is clear that this is the case.

### Five Point International Appeal

The appeal by the Dalai Lama for International assistance in Tibet, proves that still after all these centuries, the Dalai Lama is still portrayed as the leader of Tibet.

In 1987 the Dalai Lama appealed to the International community for assistance. Addressing the United States Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the Dalai Lama proposed his "Five Point Peace Plan for Tibet," not calling for Tibetan independence, but a cooperation with the Chinese government for peace. "The five points are: (i) Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace; ii) Abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people; (iii) Respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms; (iv) Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste; and (v) Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples. [21]" The Chinese government did not go for it and when riots ensued, they rendered Tibet under martial law. In 1989, the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for a steadfast dedication to

non-violence. Because of this non-violent approach, due to the pacifist philosophies of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibet remained under the control of the Chinese government.

Anniversary of a failed uprising: 2008 Protests break mainstream media

On the 49th Anniversary of Tibet's failed uprising against Communist China, hundreds of Tibetan protesters marched on the capital city, Lhasa. What started out as a peaceful protest, brought about riots around the region with casualties and the new attention of the media, when they were stopped and arrested by Chinese People's Armed Police. China reacted with curfews, strict limited access to Tibetan areas. " Protests led by Buddhist monks turn violent, with shops and vehicles torched and gunshots echoing through the streets of Lhasa. [19]"

Monday, March 10th 2008: fifteen monks lead a peaceful pro-Tibet march, distributing pamphlets and raising the banned Tibetan national flag. " They are arrested immediately following brief protests, and are reportedly beaten. Nearby shops are ordered to close. More armed forces are deployed to warn people not to take part in any more protests. The whereabouts and conditions of the detained monks are unknown. [20]" The following day, " 2,000 Chinese troops fire tear gas to disperse hundreds of monks calling for the release of their fellow monks and shouting pro-Tibet slogans. [20]"

Anniversary of a failed uprising: International Reactions

International reaction spread quickly. Pro-Tibet protests occurred at many Chinese Embassy's in countries such as, Australia, Canada, Nepal, and the

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United States. The march on the embassy in the US capital, Washington, D. C., turned into a riot, by a throwing of a rock and ended in the arrest of a few protestors. With the 2008 Olympics being hosted in Beijing, China, the media attention brought about an opportunity for Tibet and embarrassment for China. During the Olympic torch relay, supporters of Tibet take advantage of the media coverage and display banners saying, " Free Tibet" and " Peace in Tibet."

#### Viewpoints: Free Tibet

Support for Tibet is nothing new. Only now with technology delivering breaking news from all corners of the world, support for Tibet and different viewpoints can be accessed easily. Organizations like, Free Tibet founded in 1987, " stands for the right of Tibetans to determine their own future." They " campaign for an end to the Chinese occupation of Tibet and for the fundamental human rights of Tibetans to be respected. [3]" You can even sign the Dalai Lama's 75th birthday card. The International Tibet Support Network is " a vibrant coalition of 168 Tibet groups on six continents. The Network is dedicated to campaigning non-violently to restore the rights that Tibetans lost when China occupied Tibet sixty years ago. [24]" Where you can find a Tibet Group to get involved. With the internet, support from the local population has never been easier to obtain. It also serves as a portal for other viewpoints. In Carl Pei's personal blog he states, " Western coverage (CNN, Fox, BBC) hasn't merely been biased against China, but downright against China. A lot of lies and misinformation was spread. [5]"

#### Viewpoints: Through Chinese Eyes

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Peter Hassler was an English teacher in China from 1996 to 1998, and his work was published repeatedly in the several nationwide newspapers. He wrote, in "Western eyes there is only one answer to the Tibet question: Free Tibet. [25]" In an interview with Mei Zhiyuan, a man of Chinese ethnicity who was sent by the Chinese government in 1997 in "Volunteer Aiding Tibet," and when Peter asked him "why he had volunteered to work there, he stated the reason he volunteered, 'Because all of us know that Tibet is a less developed place that needs skilled people.'" He also stated that he "'sees Tibet -- as a harmonious region that benefits from Chinese support.' [25]"

## Conclusion

So, where is Tibet now? Overall, I find that Tibet has been, most likely, what the Chinese wanted them to become, a commercialized and controlled region under the Chinese government's rule. Will Tibet ever be free? In my opinion, Tibet will never become free until Tibetan Buddhism is free from the oppression it has suffered under China's rule. This oppression has stunted the growth of a religion, culture and an entire region of people in Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism has not changed since its beginning, largely due to the unwillingness of the Tibetan people to stand up forcefully to the Chinese government. Although the region has received much international support and praise for the Buddhist philosophy of non-violence, I feel it is this pacifist belief system instilled in the Tibetan region that has helped China maintain a stranglehold on the Tibetan people and the region. Until Tibet can either muster up a forceful effort and stand up against the Chinese government, which is highly unlikely given that Buddhism calls for peace, or present a governing body that wins approval of the Chinese ruling party (that is free <https://assignbuster.com/tibetan-buddhism-and-the-influence-of-china-history-essay/>)

from religious influence,) China will continue to dominate the region and the Tibetan people. Finally, with the influence of the Chinese government ever so present in Tibet, this will also make it difficult for Tibet to ever take on their own identity as a people, a government, and a region.