

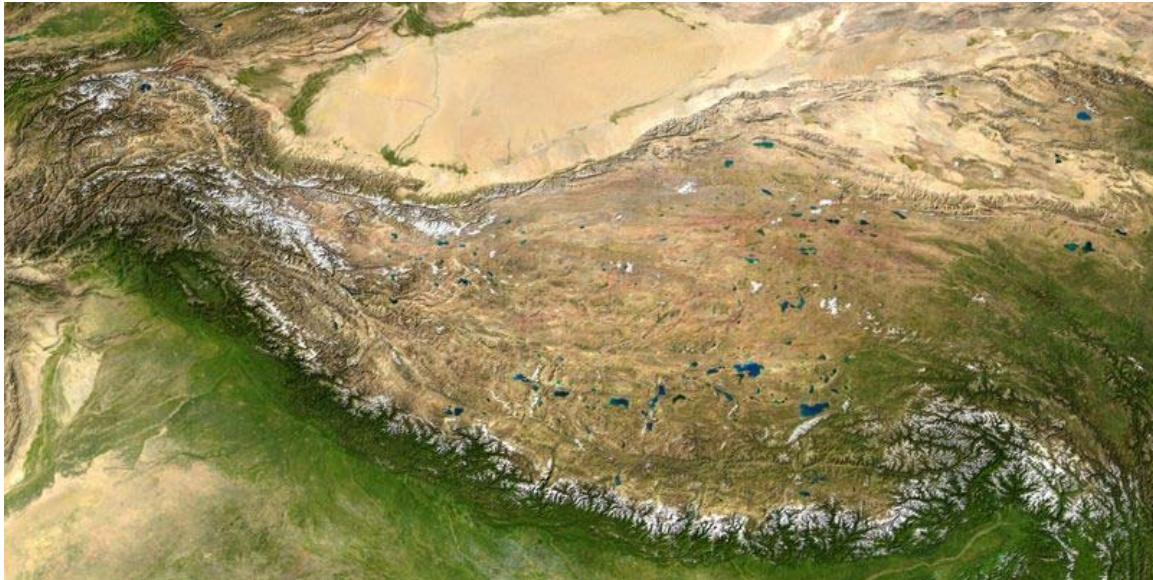
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1.1 Introduction

Historians set facts in a structure that reflects their beliefs. In the West we're accustomed to reliable facts interpreted in ways that can be debated. Facts in Tibetan histories are less dependable. Early texts supplement real events with myths to promote Buddhism. Contemporary documents use selective facts and factoids as evidence that Tibetans were a free people devoted to spiritual life, or are Chinese people recently liberated from clerical despots. This chapter explains why Tibet's location makes it important to China, how Tibet's history and culture developed, and it introduces major Tibetan leaders and deities. The facts are dependable. The stories are identified as such.

1.2 Geography

Millennia ago the Tibetan plateau lay below the sea of Tethys between the Eurasian and Australian land masses. Now its mean elevation is 15,000 feet where there's only half as much oxygen as at sea level.



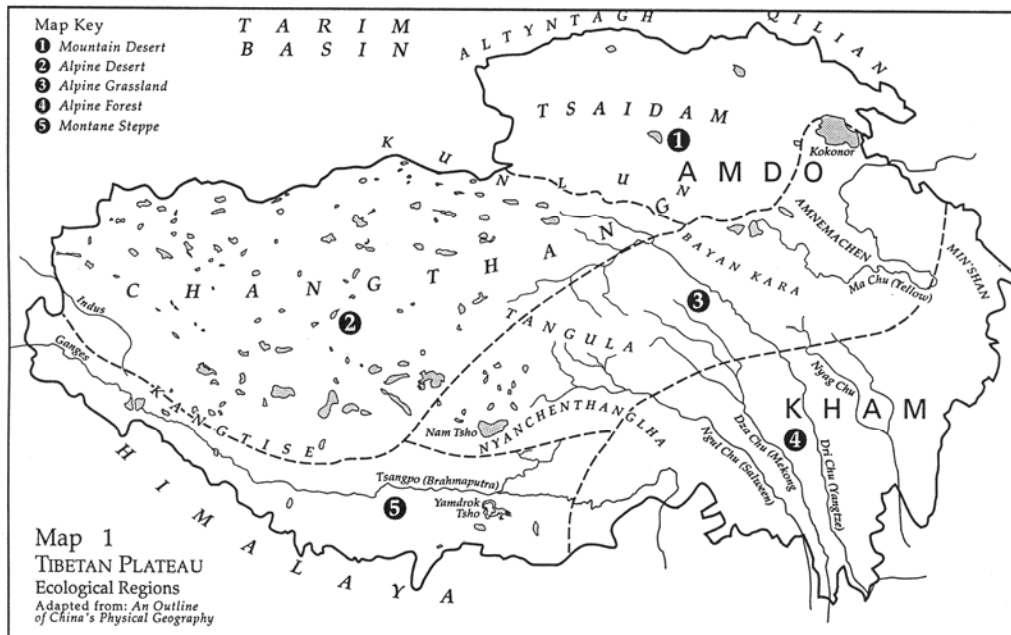
North-northwest oriented satellite image by NASA. The Tibetan Plateau is above the Himalayan range. The Taklamakan plain is the lighter area near the top.

When the 20 mile thick Australian tectonic plate broke apart 60 million years ago its southern piece became the Antarctic. Its other half, which became the Indian subcontinent, headed north. Fifteen million years later, traveling six inches a year, it touched the Eurasian shore. It continued plowing north, slowing at last to a couple of inches a year having compressed the plate edges by five hundred miles or more. The Indian plate was driven downward. Great cracks developed in the Eurasian plate as it was levered up. Around 15 million years ago, a hot wet plain emerged from beneath the Tethys Sea and Tibet was born. Fractures formed as the plate was pushed ever higher. A million or two years later, the Himalayan Mountains began to rise along with the Kunlun and other east-west ranges further north. Around eight million years ago, the

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Himalaya, still rising four inches a year in some places today, began to block the monsoon. Tibet's climate turned frigid and dry. Erosion by monsoon rain south of the Himalayas began to deposit the Bengal Fan that now extends fifteen hundred miles into the ocean.

After the waters of the Tethys drained away its seabed became the Tibetan plateau. A lake region emerged in the west and northwest, a river region to the east, south, and west, and a mountain desert in the northeast. The lake region is an arid wind-swept 700 miles broad alpine desert about the size of France. Winds from Siberia eroded the mountains there and blew vast quantities of soil to northern China. The valleys are shallow and the land is dotted with large and small salt and fresh-water lakes. The soil is boggy like the Siberian tundra. There are many hot springs but the cold is so intense some freeze into ice columns. The permafrost is hundreds of feet deep. Nomads from the Mongolian steppes were attracted to this harsh land by salt deposits. Some stayed close by on the neighboring alpine grassland. Others settled further south and east in the river region to farm the rich alluvial deposits, especially on the banks of the Tsangpo where two thirds of Tibet's agriculture is still based.



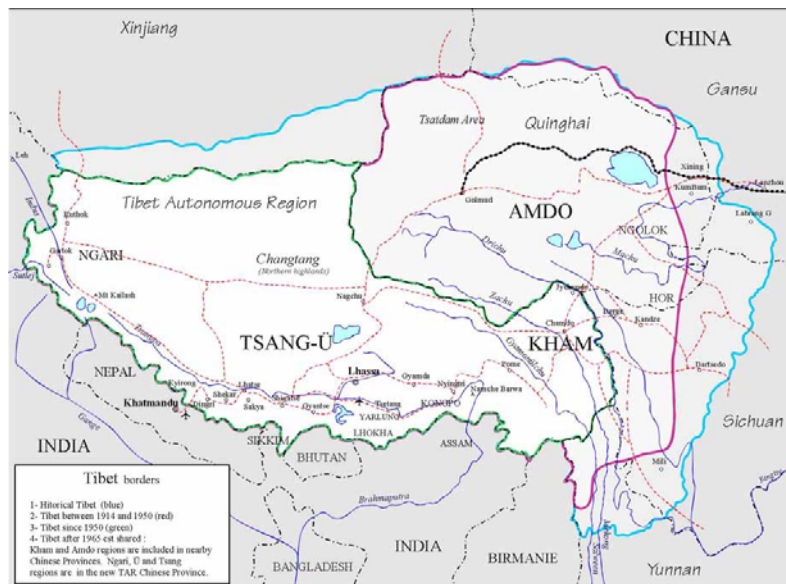
Tibetan Plateau Ecological Regions

The river region's mountain valleys are narrow, rugged and deep but the broad plains of Lhasa, Shigatse and Gyantse are quite hospitable. The southeast part of the region is low enough for some monsoon rain to penetrate. Forests prosper there. All the great rivers of Asia, the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Salween, Mekong, Yangtze and the Yellow River rise in Tibet's river region. That water is critically important to India and China.

Tibet's borders changed greatly over time, and are disputed. The Dalai Lama's Government in Exile defines Tibet to include the provinces of Tsang in the west, U in the

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center, Kham in the east and Amdo in the northeast. China defines the Tibet Autonomous Region as only U-Tsang and the western part of Kham. They merge Eastern Kham and Amdo into other provinces. Further confusing the question, China has also claimed all areas that were ever within Tibet's cultural influence, including Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, substantial parts of Nepal, and India's Arunachal Pradesh.



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1.3 History

The central theme of Tibet's history before the mid-9th century AD is its growth and decline as a powerful empire that included substantial areas of western China. It was then ruled for four hundred years by regional warlords while Buddhism developed its uniquely Tibetan form and the Chinese territory was lost. In the mid-13th century Tibet became a theocracy under a series of Buddhist sects until the mid-20th century. The degree to which Tibet was independent varied. It was a protectorate during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) when China was part of the Mongol Empire, independent during the native Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), a protectorate during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) when China was ruled by the Manchus, and independent from 1911-1949.

Understanding how Tibet developed is a challenge because most of the early texts mention events only as they relate to religious history. The first works tell of Bonpo heroes, later ones say how Buddhism triumphed. There are many good stories but few dependable facts. It is easy to become confused, too, because important people have both a Sanskrit and a Tibetan name and are considered to be incarnations of deities with several manifestations each of which has multiple names. Only intermittent glimpses are available from outside and they are not always reliable. Travelers' tales range from Herodotus' 350 BC report of a country inhabited by gold-digging giant ants - people who pan for gold in Himalayan rivers still leave mounds of sand that look like huge ant nests - to accounts of flying lamas by the scholarly Alexandra David-Neel who explored Tibet in disguise early in the 20th century. There are excellent histories of 20th

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century Tibet but earlier events are hard to verify. New information is emerging as more manuscripts are translated but it's not likely we'll ever be certain about the origins of the Tibetan people because so many documents have been destroyed.

Recently discovered archeological relics show people were living in Tibet at least twenty and perhaps even thirty thousand years ago. They were herding horses, cattle and sheep eight thousand years ago and were growing crops six thousand years ago. The original inhabitants roamed in from Mongolia but nobody was keeping records in Tibet then. There were no early universities as there were in India and other lands where life was easier. The first historical data about early Tibet surfaced around 1900 when Mongolian shepherds offered manuscripts to travelers from Europe. British and French expeditions went to investigate and discovered a library hidden in a cave a thousand years before at Kansou on the Silk Road. The texts included long lists of kings and tales of how the early lineages originated.

The texts tell of four original tribes (five, six or seven if some groups are tribes not clans within a tribe). The genealogies of six clans are detailed along with where they lived and how clans and tribes assembled into three groups in the north, south and west. Much of that history is likely accurate but it is hard at best to know which details are factual. One Tibetan myth is that before the time of Buddha Gotama there was a battle among several kings in India, one of whom, Rupati, fled with a thousand troops disguised as women who founded the Tibetan race. It's likely that at least one king and his men did flee from India and joined Mongolian settlers. The more often told story is that Tibetans descend from a monkey saint and a female demon whose children lost their simian and ogreish properties and became the first men and women. It happened this way. One day monkey Hanuman told deity Chenrezig about a fight in the land of ogres. Chenrezig asked if he could meditate in the snowy mountains. He said yes so Chenrezig dubbed him Monkey Bodhisattva and teleported him to a cave in Tibet. An ogress came there disguised as a monkey while he meditated and flung herself down before him. Monkey continued to meditate. She tried again the next day and the next. On the eighth day she appeared as a sexy woman and said *'Let's get married'*. When Monkey said he couldn't she told him if he didn't she would die in anger. That would doom her to rebirth in the lower realms so, because bodhisattvas must help others, Monkey had to break his vow. After much sex, he asked Chenrezig if he should marry. He was told he should and his sons would be Buddhas. The goddess Tara who was also there said: *'Well! Well!'* Hanuman's first child was a boy with no fur and a red face who drank blood. Hanuman had him adopted by monkeys. A year later the boy had four hundred starving progeny. Hanuman consulted Chenrezig and was told some would form the paternal and others the maternal line of his descendants. The first would be wise, compassionate and known as the Bodhisattvas Having a Great Mind. The maternal line would be full of pride, jealousy and ignorance and be known as the Carnivorous Butchers Who Eat Lice. Chenrezig gave Hanuman grain to teach his grandchildren how to farm. More and more were born, fights broke out and four groups formed. The story evolves into the history of Tibet's earliest known kings.

The first rulers of a significant area of Tibet were Shangshung kings in the west. The origins of this long-lived civilization are not known. A likely theory is that it rose on the Chang Tang plateau where an Iron Age warrior horse culture is now being uncovered.

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That area was much more habitable before it began growing colder and drier around 1500 BC. The extent of Shangshung military control is uncertain but their culture, which was influenced by India, Gandhara and Persia, dominated all of western Tibet north into the Taklamakan and east into central Tibet. The Bonpo religion seems to have originated there. Bonpo sources attribute it to Lord Shenrab Miwo's reformation of an earlier religion¹. They say he was the middle of three studious brothers who asked the God of Compassion for guidance. The eldest, Dakpa, was directed to work in the world's past age. The middle one, Selwa, took the name Shenrab and is the teacher for this age. The youngest, Shepa, will teach the next age. Shenrab was born a prince, married and had children and renounced the world when he was 31 to live in austerity and teach². His work was obstructed for years by the demon Khyabpa Lakring. It was while he was chasing the demon in 1,063 BC to retrieve his stolen horses that Shenrab made his only visit to Tibet. The few people he taught there were unready to respond but he said his teachings would flourish among them later.

The Bod kingdom that arose in south central Tibet when the Shangshung empire declined developed into the Yarlung dynasty. Texts give starting dates ranging from 95 to 794 BC. The Yarlung tradition is of 42 kings before the dynasty's fall in 842 AD, the first nine of whom seem to be mythic but may have had real prototypes. The next fourteen may have been regional kings of earlier states. One of the first nine kings, Nyatri Tsembo, has been identified as the fifth son of a regional king in Nepal. The legend is that he was born with blue eyebrows, lower eyelids that blinked, a full set of teeth and webbed feet. His parents set him afloat down the Ganges in a copper bowl. He was rescued and raised by a poor farmer, grew into an attractive young man and set off over the Himalaya in search of his destiny. When he descended into Tibet the people were impressed and asked where he came from. He pointed up at the mountain pass. They thought he meant he was a god and asked him to be their king. In legend the Yarlung dynasty began with kings who lived in the sky and left no trace on earth. They came down to a mountain on a cord and went back the same way when they died. The last, Grigum Tsanpo, provoked a duel during a drinking contest in 414 AD and was mortally wounded after accidentally severing the cord. The winner of the contest took his place and started a new line. Some texts say Grigum established Buddhism in Tibet, others that he sponsored a new version of the pre-Bon religion. In any case, he was probably the true founder of the Yarlung dynasty.

The Yarlung grew in strength until Songtsen Gampo (629-649) defeated the last Shangshung king, Ligmi, married a Shangshung princess, unified Tibet and developed it into a formidable military power. He invaded south and took Princess Bhrikuti of Nepal as his second wife then east and symbolized his conquests there with Chinese Princess Wencheng as his third wife. King Grigum may have paved the way a couple of centuries earlier and Buddhist travelers from China to India may have done some proselytizing but it was certainly Songtsen Gampo with encouragement from his Nepali and Chinese Buddhist wives who was the first Tibetan king to make laws promoting Buddhism. He sent scholars to India to study Sanskrit and develop a Tibetan script that was used to record Tibet's first Buddhist scriptures, a code of law and histories. Most importantly to

¹ Likely also the precursor of the American Indian shamanistic religions

² A similar background to Buddha Gotama and other religious leaders

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Songtsen Gampo, a written language made it possible to administer his fast growing empire. After a catastrophic flood destroyed the villages and covered with sand the fertile fields of the Yarlung valley where he and his predecessors were based, he built a fort at Lhasa where the Potala Palace now stands and moved his capital there.

Buddhism made slow progress in Tibet for the next hundred years until King Trisong Detsen (755-797) who surpassed even Songtsen Gampo's military achievements and was the country's most successful warrior king. He even conquered China's western regions and enabled his successor to force the treaty that "*... the whole region to the east ... being the country of Great China and the whole region to the west being assuredly that of the country of Great Tibet, from either side of that frontier there shall be no warfare, no hostile invasions, and no seizure of territory*". Prior to his reign Tibetan princes were being trained in Chinese schools of law or Indian monastic universities but Buddhism had little impact outside the court. Trisong Detsen greatly accelerated Buddhism's development and established its distinctive form in Tibet. He made it the state religion in 762, had many books and teachers brought from India, started systematic translation of Sanskrit and Chinese scriptures, and began building Tibet's first monastery, Samye, in 767. When eight years of earthquakes there made completion of the buildings impossible he sent to India for the sorcerer-priest Padmasambhava after whose magic dancing the earthquakes ceased. Tantric practices then became a key feature of Tibetan religion. Buddhism had been a divisive force because Songtsen Gampo's Nepali wife said study and good deeds are the path to enlightenment while his Chinese wife said sudden illumination is the way. In 782 Trisong Detsen initiated a three-year-long debate between masters of the two schools that ended in resounding defeat for China's technique. Although a Zen-like form of Tibetan Buddhist practice remains alive, that contest set the stage for the development of its primary form in which rigorous religious debate develops the reasoning power of the left brain while chanting and ritual stimulates the right brain's intuitive faculty.

During the reign of King Ralpachen 'the hairy one' (815-836) Tibetan armies forced a further treaty with China. Ralpachen was an exceptionally devout Buddhist who redistributed land to peasants three times during his reign. He was assassinated by his brother Langdarma aka Tri Wudum Tsen, a Bon who hated Buddhism, destroyed monasteries and was assassinated in 842 by a Buddhist lama. By one account, a young lama took pity on the king because he was accumulating such a weight of sins. He dressed in a black cloak with a white lining and met the king on a charcoal blackened white horse. He bowed three times, first bending his bow, then fitting the arrow, then firing as he rose the third time. He escaped after turning his cloak inside out and riding through a river to wash the charcoal off his horse. In another version a great lama performed a religious dance in a black cloak and hat and when the king congratulated him the lama knelt, drew a bow and arrow from his sleeve and shot the king before turning his cloak white side out to escape. The event is celebrated in an annual dance by Black Hat lamas.

Tibet was divided between Langdarma's sons. It fragmented into warring principalities and the Chinese territory was lost. This is when the texts found in 1905 were hidden. These troubled times lasted until Tibet came under the dominance of Mongols four hundred years later. In memory of Tibet's era of imperial glory Songtsen Gampo,

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Trisong Detsen and Ralpachen are known as the Three Great Kings. Buddhism reemerged as a powerful influence half way through this troubled period in the 11th century when several new orders were established, the Kadam, Kagyu and Sakya. Additional texts were translated during this "second diffusion" of Buddhism and packaged into the 108 volume Kangyur and 225 volumes of commentaries, the Tengyur. Monasteries were established throughout Tibet and their power grew with their increasing wealth. Rivalry among sects and between monasteries was compounded by supporters in warring principalities. By the early 13th century monastic establishments had become the dominant economic, political and spiritual power in Tibet but no one sect was dominant.

Tibet remained fragmented until the newly risen Mongol empire conquered it and became patrons of the Sakya. Godan Khan, a son of Ogodai who succeeded his father Genghiz Khan invaded Tibet in 1240. Impressed by the reported powers of lamas who protected monasteries by fog and miraculous showers of stones, Godan summoned to his court Pandita, the head Sakya lama. Seizing the opportunity, Pandita made his submission and was charged with convincing his rivals to do the same. Godan's successor, Kublai Khan, emperor of China, was converted to Buddhism by Pandita's nephew and successor, Phagspa. Around 1254 Kublai Khan made Tibetan Buddhism China's religion and accepted Phagspa as his guru. That is the origin of cho-yon, the ideal form from the Tibetan viewpoint of Sino-Tibetan relations. Cho means religion and yon a secular patron. Cho-yon signifies equality of the two. When Kublai Khan became Great Khan in 1260 he named Phagspa head of religion throughout his empire.

Tibet had by this time been in the Mongol empire for twenty years but it was not under direct Mongol authority and was not unified. The Sakya sect had triumphed but Phagspa did not rule Tibet. He had not even been there for twenty years. In 1264, Kublai Khan sent him and his brother Phagna Dorje to Tibet and the next year made Phagna the secular "head of all Tibet". Two years later Phagna was dead, probably poisoned. After putting down a rebellion by Sakya rivals Kublai Khan made Phagspa the administrative head. Central Tibet was divided into thirteen districts, most headed by monasteries, and a census was taken to set taxes for 36,500 families, primarily service in a postal system. When Phagspa died in 1280, apparently also by poisoning, new revolts broke out. After they were quelled the Sakya remained preeminent almost until the end of Mongol rule in China but with increasing difficulty after Kublai Khan died in 1295. In 1358 they were displaced by Kagyu lamas. Ten years later, when China regained its independence from the Mongols, Tibet followed suit and in 1368 asserted its own independence.

The Ming (1368-1644) was the first native dynasty to rule all China since the Tang (618-917). Their focus was on domestic issues. They did not want to control Tibet, just use Tibetan Buddhists' influence to stop the Mongols from returning. They courted leaders of every order with gifts and titles. Missions to China became very popular until the Mongol threat faded in the early 1400s. The Ming then lost interest in Tibet, the missions grew less rewarding and official communication between China and Tibet almost ceased. Rivalry among sects and warlords inside Tibet increased. In 1436 the Rinpung family replaced the Kagyu as rulers of central Tibet. They held power for over a century until their governor of Shigatse, Karma Tseten, declared himself King of Tsang, allied with the

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Kagyü and conquered what is now the Tibet Autonomous Region. He and his two successors ruled from 1565 to 1642.

The rise of the Gelug order culminating in Tibet's rule by the Dalai Lama coincided with the Ming dynasty. The Gelug founder, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), was born just before the dynasty's founding and at the start of the Kagyü ascendancy. He established a less ascetic, more ritualized and reformist practice that attracted many who were repelled by the corruption of the three hundred year old Sakya and Kagyü orders. He founded Ganden monastery in 1409 where he had a vision of Atisha. His followers established the other great Gelug monasteries, Drepung in 1416, Sera in 1419 and Tashilhumpo thirty years later. To differentiate themselves they adopted yellow robes and hats instead of red. Some say Buddha Gotama had prescribed yellow and the first monks wore red only because red dye cost less. Others say they chose red to symbolize independence from China whose Emperor wore yellow. Many believe the Gelug yellow robes symbolize Tsongkhapa's birth at Tsongkha the "place of onions" in Amdo because onion skins make a yellow dye.

Mongols dominated Tibet a second time a century and a half after Tsongkhapa died. Many Mongols had settled in northern Tibet during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) established by Kublai Khan. Many more came when that dynasty fell and the Ming attacked the Mongols and cut off their trade. The Eastern Mongol tribes later regained strength under Dayan Khan (1473-1543) and his successor Altan Khan (1543-1582). In 1566 Altan Khan invaded Tibet and said he would adopt their religion if they submitted or conquer them if they didn't. They took the realistic course. In 1570 the Ming switched from defending their frontier militarily to appeasing the increasingly powerful Altan Khan with gifts and trading rights. He used those rights to create patronage relations with other Eastern Mongol tribes and established his spiritual claim to be their leader in 1578 when he invited to his court Sonam Gyatso, abbot of Drepung and the most eminent lama of his time. When Sonam Gyatso came and identified himself as an incarnation of Phagspa and Altan as one of Kublai Khan, Altan proclaimed him and his two previous incarnations Dalai Lama (we will examine their lives below), said all his subjects must adopt Buddhism and reformed Mongol law to conform to Tibet's. Tibetan Buddhism spread rapidly among the Mongols.

The Kagyü-supported Tsang kings who ruled most of Tibet viewed all this with great suspicion. It looked like a political alliance between the Gelug and a foreign power. After the 3rd Dalai Lama died in 1588 and a great-grandson of Altan Khan's was recognized as his successor, suspicion turned to certainty. All the sects had Mongol patrons but the Gelug depended on them almost entirely because they had not yet accumulated the wealth of the older orders. Rivalry between the Gelug in U and the Kagyü-supported regime in Tsang grew increasingly bitter. Tsang forces attacked Drepung and Sera monasteries in 1605 and massacred as many as 5,000 monks. The 4th Dalai Lama fled and his Mongol allies regrouped under new leadership in the west. He returned to Lhasa and died in suspicious circumstances in 1618. Civil war between Tsang and U, Kagyü and Gelug continued until the man who was in effect Regent during the 5th Dalai Lama's minority got Gushri Khan (he supplanted Altan Khan's descendants) to join the fray in 1636. Six years later Gushri Khan's army defeated the Tsang forces and he conferred temporal authority on the 5th Dalai Lama.

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A natural framework for the next stage of Tibet's history is the lives of the Dalai Lamas, although from the 6th to the 12th rule was almost entirely in the hands of regents. As noted above, the 1st and 2nd Dalai Lamas were identified posthumously by Altan Khan along with the then-living 3rd incarnation. The 1st Dalai Lama Gedun Drupa (1391-1474) whose birth name was Pema Dorje came from a nomad family. He took his full ordination vows when he was twenty and was Tsongkhapa's principal disciple. Some say he was Tsongkhapa's nephew. In 1409 he became abbot of Ganden, the monastery Tsongkhapa founded near Lhasa, and in 1447 when he was fifty six, he founded Tashilumpo in Shigatse. Tashilumpo developed into one of the largest Gelug monastery universities and the seat of the second highest Gelug leader, the Panchen Lama. The 1st Dalai Lama was famous for scholarship and wrote eight books.

The 2nd Dalai Lama, Gedun Gyatso (1475-1541) was the son of a well-known Nyingma³ tantric practitioner and farmer. It is said that as soon as he could speak he told his parents his name was Pema Dorje and he wanted to live at Tashilumpo. He was recognized as Gedun Drupa's reincarnation when he was eleven and was enthroned at Tashilumpo. He studied there and at Drepung and became abbot of Drepung in 1517 when he was forty two. The next year, he revived the Great Prayer Festival involving all three great Gelug university monasteries, Sera, Drepung and Ganden, and became abbot of Sera in 1525. He was a renowned scholar and mystical poet and traveled extensively to promote Gelug teachings.

The 3rd Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (1543-1588) was from a rich family whose previous children died young. He was fed the milk of a white goat and named "the prosperous one saved by goat's milk". He was recognized as the reincarnation of Gedun Gyatso when he was three and enthroned at Drepung where he became abbot in 1552 when he was nine years old. He was appointed abbot of Sera six years later and established Namgyal monastery in 1574, four years before the Mongol leader Altan Khan entitled him Dalai Lama. He also founded Kumbum monastery at Tsongkhapa's birthplace and Lithang monastery in Kham. He died while teaching in Mongolia and is said to have converted many Mongols to Buddhism and away from the ritual sacrifice of animals and of wives to their deceased husbands.

The 4th Dalai Lama, Yonten Gyatso (1589-1616), was born in Mongolia and was a great-grandson of Altan Khan. He was recognized as the reincarnation of Sonam Gyatso by Mongol leaders who had no authority to do so and was only accepted by a delegation from Tibet's three great monasteries after a long and contentious debate. He was educated by Tibetan lamas in Mongolia until he was twelve, took his full ordination vows when he was twenty six, became abbot of Drepung and then Sera monasteries, and died a year later. Local warlords and leaders of the older sects were feeling increasingly threatened by the Mongol-backed Gelug establishment. It's probable he was assassinated. The king of Tsang said he was insulted by the Dalai Lama's attendants and attacked Drepung and Sera monasteries in Lhasa in 1617 after the Dalai Lama's death. Many other Gelug monasteries were also attacked and converted. Half a century

³ *Nyingma is the original Tibetan Buddhist order*

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of conflict only ended in 1642 when the Mongol forces prevailed. Many followers of the older Buddhist sects fled at this time and ended up dominating Sikkim.

The Great 5th Dalai Lama, Lobsang Gyatso (1617-1682), was born into the noble Zahor family of Tagtse from where Songtsen Gampo had moved Tibet's capital to Lhasa centuries before. In 1619 when he was recognized as a reincarnation his father was involved in a plot against the Tsang king. The Zahors were ordered to the court at Shigatse. The father tried to escape but was caught and imprisoned. The mother fled with her son to her own family's castle. After the Tsang king died in 1621 the Panchen Rinpoche, abbot of Tashilumpo, persuaded the new king in Shigatse to let Lobsang Gyatso be taken to Drepung to be enthroned as the 5th Dalai Lama. The treasurer of Drepung's Ganden Palace then began intriguing for political as well as religious power for the Dalai Lama. His early moves were thwarted by the Panchen Rinpoche but in 1636 he got Gushri Khan's Dzungars from Western Mongolia to attack Mongol tribes allied with the king of Tsang. Gushri Khan later attacked Tibetans in Kham who supported Tsang and finally the Tsang king's own forces. The Dalai Lama objected that the Tsang were not his enemies and had been provoked by officials when he was too young to control them. The treasurer deceived him and ordered Gushri Khan to lead his army against the Tsang, pretending it was the Dalai Lama's order. By the time the truth came out it was too late to object. Victorious Gushri Khan offered his conquests to the Dalai Lama and said he just wanted to be defender of the realm. So in 1642 the Dalai Lama was enthroned at Shigatse and Gushri Khan was entitled King of Tibet and retired with his army to Kokonor in Amdo.

Formerly the abbot of a monastery and leader of one religious order, the Dalai Lama was now the spiritual and temporal leader of a nation and Kham was part of Tibet for the first time in eight hundred years. Amdo was ruled by Gushri Khan. The treasurer who engineered the Gelug ascendancy became the Desi, meaning regent, and set about forcible conversion of monasteries of the older sects. The Ganden Palace at Drepung monastery was inappropriate as the country's political capital so in 1645 the Dalai Lama initiated what turned out to be a forty three year project to build the Potala palace on the outskirts of Lhasa where King Songtsen Gampo had built a fort a thousand years earlier. He and his government moved into the Potala's eastern section, the White Palace, in 1649. Relations with Amdo remained good and when Gushri Khan died in 1655, the Dalai Lama appointed Gushri's son to succeed him.

While Tibet was beset by civil war and invasion similar events were reshaping China. The Ming dynasty was being destroyed by a peasant rebellion and replaced by Manchu invaders from the northeast. Changing relationships with their neighbors from the north led Tibet and China to significant changes in their dealings with each other. Peace was restored in Tibet and the Great 5th Dalai Lama was enthroned just before the Manchu Qing dynasty officially began in China but seventeen years before their conquest was complete. The name Manchu is said to originate from when in 1615 the 4th Dalai Lama recognized Nurachi as an incarnation of Manjushri. Nurachi had unified the tribes now known as Manchu and his power was growing fast. It's very likely Tibetan leaders would have made that gesture of respect. The Dalai Lama role had been established by Altan Khan less than forty years before.

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Nurachi broke away from the Ming Empire and established the State of Manchu in 1616, the same year the 4th Dalai Lama died. Over the next half century he and his successors conquered China and established the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The Ming came to an end when a massive peasant uprising seized the capital and the last emperor committed suicide. The first Qing Emperor, Shunzhi, was enthroned six months later when the peasant army was routed. He was the five year old son of Nurachi's son Taiji who had succeeded him and died suddenly in 1643. Taiji's half brother Dorgon acted as regent until he died in 1650 then, because Shunzhi was still only twelve, his politically astute mother the Empress Dowager became the decision maker. From the start of the Qing dynasty in 1644 it took seventeen years to conquer the rest of China. During that time they used trade to neutralize the Eastern Mongols. The Western Mongols could not be bought off the same way because they had trade routes to Persia. The Empress Dowager asked the Dalai Lama to visit the emperor in Beijing because Mongols revered him and she hoped to use that to China's advantage. She also wanted to avert military threat by Tibet. The Desi (regent) had in 1647 launched an attack on Bhutan that failed but one against Ladakh two years later was very successful. The 5th Dalai Lama was not yet the commanding figure he became later. He proposed meeting outside the Great Wall to signify a relationship of equality but ended up in Beijing in 1653 on a throne thirty feet from the emperor's higher one. He was exempted from performing the kowtow, however, and the Yellow Palace was built for him. The relationship he formed had the appearance of cho-yon but the emperor did not convert to Buddhism.

The 5th Dalai Lama worked hard for peace as he gained control. When the Panchen Rinpoche died at age 93 in 1662 he instituted the tradition of recognizing his reincarnation (later known as the Panchen Lama). The first was discovered in one of five great Bon lineages, the Dru family. The Great 5th later recognized Bon as a legitimate religion and in 1674 signaled another reconciliation by receiving the Karmapa leader at the Potala Palace. Some think his aim was to consolidate power, others that he was a humanitarian. In any case, he forced noble families to disband their private armies, took away their power of life and death over peasants, established educational institutions for lay and monk officials, and sent representatives throughout Tibet to reduce excessive taxes, resolve feuding, establish new monasteries, and resettle abandoned areas. He was a scholar who wrote more books than all other Dalai Lamas combined (except the present one) and made a deep study of the mystical and tantric works of the Nyingma as well as Gelug texts. When he died in 1682, the Desi pretended for fifteen years that he was meditating in seclusion. Some say the Dalai Lama suggested he do that to make certain the Potala palace was completed. Others think the Desi wanted to hang on to power. It was an elaborate deception that included a monk who looked like the Dalai Lama taking his place to meet visiting Mongol princes.

The 6th Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso (1683-1706), whose name means "ocean of melodious songs" was identified when he was five and educated in secret for nine years. In 1697, when he was fourteen, the Desi sent word of the death of the 5th and discovery of the 6th Dalai Lama to Emperor Kangzhi. The emperor was angry about the deception but sent representatives to the enthronement. In 1700 the 14 year old 3rd Chogyal of Sikkim fled to Lhasa and became a friend of the Dalai Lama. He developed into a distinguished scholar and was appointed State Astrologer. The Dalai Lama developed a passion for wine, women and song, renounced his vows and became very popular. The

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people explained his behavior by saying he had two bodies, one that meditated inside the Potala Palace and one that went carousing. Some think he was not really an incarnation of the Dalai Lama. Many are delighted by his poetry. He met his end after Gushri Khan's grandson, Lhabzang Khan, inherited the King of Tibet title by murdering his brother. The Desi's concealment of the 5th Dalai Lama's death had made China suspicious and left the government in Lhasa in turmoil. Lhabzang led an army to Lhasa with China's approval, killed the Desi and captured the Dalai Lama. Some believe high Tibetan lamas seized the opportunity to get the scandalous 6th exiled, others think Lhabzang initiated delivering him to China's Emperor. In any case, he died en route, most likely poisoned. Lhabzang then tried to replace him with a boy who was rumored to be his son. Gelug leaders protested and China sent an agent to investigate. The Panchen Lama supported Lhabzang's candidate and the emperor endorsed him but a rival was discovered, a boy who was born in Lithang as the 6th said would happen in a song (*"White crane lend me your wings, I go no farther than Lithang, And thence return again"*). That boy was enthroned as the 7th Dalai Lama, Kelzang Gyatso (1708-1757).

While Tibet was unifying under the 5th Dalai Lama the new dynasty was growing stronger in China. When Emperor Shunzhi died of smallpox in 1661 he was succeeded by his eight year old son who reigned as the Kangxi Emperor for sixty years. By the late 1600s the emperor no longer needed the Dalai Lama's influence over the Western Mongols. He could deal with them militarily. In 1689 he made a treaty with Russia by which neither empire would ally with Mongols. The Western Mongol tribes that were reunited as the Dzungars in the early 17th century and were instrumental in bringing the 5th Dalai Lama to power in 1642 had recently established relations with Russia. Their leader, Galdan, was educated as a lama in Tibet but renounced his vows to avenge the killing of his older brother the Dzungar Khan and was entitled his successor by the 5th Dalai Lama in 1671. While Galdan was away in 1689 battling to reunify Mongolia, his nephew Tsewang Raban seized the Dzungar throne. China had made the 1689 treaty so Russia would not help Galdan after he invaded Eastern Mongolia the previous year. Galdan battled on until his remaining forces were destroyed by a Qing army in 1696. Tsewang Rabten saw the turmoil in Lhasa under the 6th Dalai Lama as an opportunity and in 1714 proposed that his daughter and the son of King of Tibet Lhabzang Khan should marry. Lhabzang's sister was already Tsewang's wife and although Lhabzang suspected the Dzungar king wanted to avenge his killing of his ally the Desi, he approved the marriage. Three years later Tsewang's forces seized Lhasa with support from Tibetans opposed to Lhabzang. King of Tibet Lhabzang appealed to China for help but was killed before it came. Widespread looting by Tsewang's Dzungar soldiers soon lost them their support and they were expelled by Tibetan forces. Then in 1720 an army arrived from China with the 7th Dalai Lama.

The Kangxi emperor had destroyed the Mongols' ability to threaten. Now he would take control of Tibet. He instituted a council of ministers, the Kashag, that was predominantly secular, and a new position, the Amban, as China's representative. The Dalai Lama had only a symbolic role. Two years later when the emperor's triumphant reign ended, a massive rebellion broke out in Kokonor. It was brutally suppressed. Then in 1724 the new emperor set a new policy. He made Tibetan general Kanchenas governor of central and western Tibet and began to withdraw China's army. Kham and Amdo were kept separate. To curtail strife the Nyingma order was banned and their monasteries were

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converted to Gelug. Three years later Kanchenas was assassinated when Tibetan nobles learned that new ambans (representatives of China's Emperor) were being sent to strengthen China's grip. Polhanas, another Tibetan general who supported the Qing raised an army and got control in 1728. A Chinese army arrived to exact retribution. Eighteen ministers and their followers were executed by the "slicing process" and the Dalai Lama was exiled. Ambans were put in charge of U and Tsang. Polhanas headed the administration and later got judicial powers. In 1735 the Dalai Lama was allowed to return but his activities were very restricted. He had no desire to rule, anyway. After taking his Gelong vows (full ordination) in 1726 he wrote many books, especially on the tantra, and wrote poetry on spiritual themes. Polhanas remained dominant until he died in 1747.

Polhanas was succeeded by his son, Gyurmey Namgyal, who over-reached in 1750 and tried to send Gelug lamas to monasteries of the older sects in Kham and Amdo. When the emperor forbade it he began raising an army and was assassinated by the ambans. Rebellion broke out and the ambans were killed by a mob. The Dalai Lama then assumed authority and awaited the arrival of a Qing army that performed the slicing process on mob leaders and Gyurmey Namgyal's family. Because he had demonstrated loyalty the Dalai Lama was reestablished as Tibet's spiritual and temporal head until he died in 1757. Replacement ambans were, however, in real control.

The 8th Dalai Lama, Jamphel Gyatso (1758-1804), was born in Kham to parents who traced their ancestry to a hero of the Gesar epic. There were several indications of his identity including a rainbow that touched his mother's shoulder, his attempts to sit in a lotus posture, and that as soon as he could speak, he said, *"I will go to Lhasa at the age of three."* He was taken to Tashilumpo monastery for the recognition ceremony, enthroned at the Potala in 1762, and fully ordained in 1777 when he was nineteen. He had no interest in politics, however, so his regent ran the government until his death. There was no longer any threat from the north because the Dzungars had been decimated by Qing armies and a smallpox epidemic. Instead problems came from Nepal and British India.

Back in 1751 the 7th Dalai Lama had written to the Newari kings in the Kathmandu Valley protesting adulteration of their silver coinage that was also Tibet's currency. The complaint was reiterated after the Gorkhas came to power in 1769. In 1774 the Panchen Lama's attempt to mediate a dispute between India and Bhutan gave Britain an opportunity to engage with Tibet. The British viceroy in India sent an emissary to try to establish trade relations. The following year Tibet offered military help to Sikkim when Nepal invaded. Three years later Nepal found an excuse to punish them for their interference. When the 3rd Panchen Lama died one of his brothers sought Nepal's help against another brother's claim on the inheritance. Nepali forces arrived in 1788. The ambans sent a Chinese army to repel them but they were too strong. The resulting peace agreement required Tibet to pay tribute to Nepal. When it was not paid Nepal invaded again in 1792. This time an army of Tibetans and Chinese routed them, drove them almost to the Kathmandu Valley and Nepal was compelled to start sending tribute to Peking. That is the basis for China's claim of sovereignty over Nepal.

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Tibet's interactions with British India and Nepal provoked Emperor Qianlong to restructure Tibet's government again. The ambans were put in direct control of the Tibetan army and foreign affairs, the Dalai Lama could only communicate with Beijing through the ambans, trade and travel were restricted, judicial decisions were subject to amban approval, Tibetan currency was under their supervision, future incarnations of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas would be identified by a lottery supervised by the ambans, sky burial was prohibited under pain of execution by the slicing process, and so on. These changes sound dramatic but they were not fully implemented and soon fell into disuse. Qianlong was near the end of his very long reign, the Qing dynasty was in decline and Tibet was more trouble than it was worth.

The 8th Dalai Lama had chosen not to rule and his next four successors died young, so regents ruled Tibet for all but seven of the 150 years from the death of the 7th Dalai Lama in 1757 to the assumption of temporal power by the Great 13th in 1895. China's power in Tibet rapidly declined during that time especially after the White Lotus rebellion of 1796-1804 and the Opium War of 1840. Increasingly unsupervised by China, the ambans' role became primarily symbolic. Their chief interest became profits from their powers of patronage.

The 9th Dalai Lama, Lungtok Gyatso (1806-1815), was recognized when he was two, escorted to Lhasa with great ceremony, enthroned when he was five, and died when he was nine, probably assassinated. A revolt in Amdo was put down by armies from China and Lhasa in 1807. The British tried to follow up on their meetings during the 8th Dalai Lama's reign but were rejected. When British India went to war with Nepal over Sikkim in 1814, China refused to intervene but continued to demand tribute from Nepal. Britain's presence in Sikkim now put it into territorial contact with Tibet.

The 10th Dalai Lama, Tsutrim Gyatso (1816-1837), was recognized and enthroned in 1822. He began studying at Drepung when he was ten, took the full ordination vows when he was nineteen and died two years later. Some say he was always in poor health, others believe he, too, was assassinated. Strife inside Tibet continued to grow during this time and China's role continued to decline. China was in the grip of a revival of the White Lotus rebellion (1822-1831) and unable to respond when in 1822 Tibetans in Kokonor rose against Mongols who they said were given all the best land. In 1835 an army had to be sent to Pobo when its ruler refused to pay taxes. It was 1854 before forces from Lhasa completely quelled the revolt in Kokonor.

The 11th Dalai Lama, Khendrup Gyatso (1838-1856), was recognized in 1841, enthroned the following year and took his novice vows when he was eleven. In 1843 the rulers of Jammu and Kashmir invaded western Tibet hoping to get control of the wool trade. Tibetan forces drove them out. The regent, Tshomoling, was exiled to Manchuria on suspicion of causing the 10th Dalai Lama's death and replaced in 1845 by the 3rd Reting Rinpoche (the 1st was the 7th Dalai Lama's tutor). In 1847 the Lhasa amban abandoned his by now theoretical military and financial powers, effectively ending Chinese control and in 1855 the seventeen year old 11th Dalai Lama assumed political leadership. He died suddenly the following year. Knowing that China could not intervene because it was in the throes of the Taiping Rebellion, Nepal invaded Tibet again when the 11th Dalai

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Lama died. Reting Rinpoche agreed to pay tribute to Nepal and grant judicial extraterritoriality to Nepalis in Tibet.

The 12th Dalai Lama, Trinley Gyatso (1856-1875), was recognized and taken to Lhasa in 1858 and enthroned in 1860. In 1862 Reting Rinpoche was judged guilty of taking bribes and replaced by an assembly of monks from Ganden and Drepung. They were superseded in 1872 by a national assembly, the tsongdu, which included representatives from all the Lhasa monasteries as well as secular officials. The 12th Dalai Lama assumed full responsibility as Tibet's leader the next year when he was eighteen and died two years later, the last Dalai Lama to die young in suspicious circumstances.

The Great 13th Dalai Lama, Thupten Gyatso (1876-1933), was born to a peasant couple, recognized in 1878 and enthroned the following year. Tibet was by that time no longer ruled as part of China's empire, the Mongols had long ceased to be a force and Nepal had never been more than an irritation. Instead, during the 13th Dalai Lama's minority British India became a threat. Their low-key efforts to open trade with Tibet over the previous century had been easily rebuffed but now India was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire and Britain feared its rival Russia planned to use Tibet as a stepping stone to India. A Russian monk, Dorjiev, was known to be the young Dalai Lama's tutor and seemed also to have a role at the Russian court. Dorjiev claimed that Shambhala, the legendary hidden Buddhist kingdom, was in fact in Russia, Russia's tsar was a manifestation of White Tara, Russians were embracing Buddhism following their advance into Mongolia, and they would support Tibet. By the time the 13th Dalai Lama assumed power in 1895 at age nineteen Britain's suspicions were at fever pitch. Japan defeated China in war that year and Britain knew China was too weak to rule Tibet. Would Russia become its new master? In 1896 Russia made an alliance with China against Japan and got rights to extend the Trans-Siberian Railway through Manchuria to the seaport at Vladivostok. Two years later, Russia forced China to grant it a lease for Port Arthur in southern Manchuria and occupied that peninsula.

Enough was enough. In late 1903 Viceroy Curzon sent a military force from India through Sikkim to force a treaty directly with Tibet. The poorly equipped Tibetans were overwhelmingly defeated in battles ever closer to Lhasa. When Younghusband's expedition approached the capital in 1904 the Dalai Lama fled at Dorjiev's urging to Mongolia. Younghusband forced the desired treaty on the remaining authorities. Soon after he entered Tibet, however, and even before the first battle, Japan attacked Port Arthur. Japan's overwhelming victory in the year-long war that followed compelled Russia to abandon its expansion in the Far East. When the desperately weak Chinese government later protested Younghusband's treaty saying Tibet was not a sovereign state, Britain no longer feared for India and was content to abandon the agreement.

In 1908 the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa and took control of the government. British emissaries had begun friendly meetings with him in 1906 and when China sent an army to depose him in 1909 he fled via Sikkim to British India and stayed there until the Qing dynasty fizzled out in 1911. China was driven out of Tibet the following year and in 1913 the Dalai Lama proclaimed Tibet's independence: *"Now the Chinese intention of colonizing Tibet under the patron-priest relationship has faded like a rainbow in the sky."* Britain's support was more circumspect. The treaty negotiated in India at the Simla

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Convention in 1913/14 by representatives of Britain, Tibet and China specified that Tibet would *"remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government at Lhasa"* but it recognized Chinese suzerainty over Tibet. It also annexed to Britain what is now the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, an area China claimed was in southeast Tibet. Tibetan representatives signed the treaty but China refused. That border, the McMahon Line, was never accepted by China and led to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The 1909 Imperial Gazetteer of India shows Nepal was also considered to be in the British Indian Empire at that time.



The outbreak of WW1 and the civil war in China distracted Western and Chinese leaders from Tibet. For the next twenty years the 13th Dalai Lama was able to rule Tibet as an independent state with an authority rivaled only by that of the Great 5th three centuries earlier. He tried to modernize Tibet, curb monastic oppression and end the country's isolation. He organized army training, established a currency and postal system, built Tibet's first power station, set up a medical institute, a police force and the first English school but monastic leaders and noble families constantly resisted. By the end of his life he came to believe Tibet would fall back under Chinese rule. He wrote: *"Very soon in this land deceptive acts may occur ... The property of all people, high and low, will be seized and the people forced to become slaves. All living beings will have to endure endless days of suffering and will be stricken with fear. Such a time will come."*

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The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (1935-) was born to a farming family in Amdo. The Kashag council of ministers ruled Tibet until he assumed power in 1950 when he was sixteen. China had sent a "condolence mission" to Lhasa when the 13th Dalai Lama died in 1933 and were allowed to set up an office. Britain got approval to do the same but the Kashag did not engage with them or other governments. When China's civil war ended in 1949 its Communist government sent an army into eastern Tibet and captured the governor's headquarters at Chamdo. The Kashag protested to the United Nations and got no support. Britain didn't help because they left India in 1947 and believed it was now an issue for Indian Prime Minister Nehru. He was silent because he hoped to ally with China against colonialism returning from Europe or emerging from the US. The US could not protest because it recognized Tibet as part of China while supporting Chiang Kai-shek against the Communists. Russia also recognized Tibet as a province of China and was China's ally. In 1950, Chinese forces crushed Tibet's small army. The Dalai Lama was enthroned a month later to provide leadership the Kashag hoped would preserve Tibet. The following year his representatives had to sign the Plan for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, which provided for joint administration.

China had military control but could not yet change Tibet's culture. Opposition from noble families and monasteries was too powerful. Land reform was immediately implemented in Eastern Kham and Amdo which were not ruled from Lhasa. Rebellion broke out there in 1956 with covert support from the CIA. The uprising grew and became broadly based all across Tibet. The Dalai Lama and his government fled to India when it was crushed in 1959. In 1965 the area that had been ruled by the Dalai Lama was dubbed the Tibet Autonomous Region. The same year it was swept up in Mao Tsetung's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to destroy "*old thinking, old culture, old habits and old customs*". In Tibet over 6,000 monasteries were destroyed and more than one in six of all Tibetans starved to death or was killed⁴.

Some religious freedom was restored after Mao died in 1976. In 1978 tillers were allowed to own land and herders to own animals. China claims GDP for the Tibet Autonomous Region was thirty times higher in 2000 than in 1950, infant mortality dropped from 43% to 0.66% and life expectancy rose from 35 to 67 years. The 1950 baseline can be disputed but the new physical infrastructure is undoubtedly healthier. Barkor Street in Lhasa, for example, used to house 44,000 people with no water supply or drainage. 30,000 people now live there in renovated buildings served by fresh water and drainage networks. There are, however, no statistics for a people's spiritual health. Ethnic Tibetans and apologists for the Chinese government have very different opinions about the impact of changes in that realm.

1.4 Social System

It is frustrating enough trying to untangle Tibet's history because, as Waddell wrote, "*The historians so-called of Tibet wrote mostly inflated bombast, almost valueless for historical purposes.*" Understanding what it was like to live in Tibet is even more

⁴ The most reliable estimate is around 400,000 of 2.8 million ethnic Tibetans reported in the 1953 Chinese census. Tibetan exiles estimate 1.2 million deaths but that includes ethnic Tibetans in Kham and Amdo, not just the TAR. Total peacetime deaths attributed to Mao Tsetung exceed 70 million, around one ninth of China's population at that time.

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difficult. There is plenty of tendentious writing where selective facts are sprinkled among assertions, exaggerations and inventions. Most Westerners depict an oasis of virtue. Chinese apologists portray brutal oppression by a tiny aristocracy. The same factoids appear so often they look like facts. It is quite a challenge to get an accurate picture of either pre- or post-Communist Tibetan life.

1.4.1 Traditional

Tibet was at first a feudal society much like those in Europe. All land belonged to the king(s). Areas suitable for farming were divided into manors and granted to noble families and monasteries. Feudalism began to take its unique form in the middle of the 13th century when Kublai Khan proclaimed the Sakya leader Tibet's sovereign. That set the stage for four hundred years of rivalry between temporal and religious leaders that ended in the mid-17th century when the 5th Dalai Lama became temporal and spiritual ruler of a unified Tibet. From then on the purpose of the government was to maximize the progress of all Tibetans to Buddhahood. Monkhhood had to be made available to as many people as possible. Parallel administrative systems were established for religious and lay matters that were overseen by the state's religious leader.

Tibet's ruling structure until it was absorbed into the People's Republic of China was finalized in 1751 when the Yigtsang and Kashag were established, two offices overseen by the office of the Dalai Lama. The Yigtsang or ecclesiastical office was headed by four monks. The Kashag, an equally powerful cabinet, was headed by three lay officials and a monk. Everything involving monks, monasteries and religious issues was the province of the Yigtsang. Secular law courts, administration and the army were under the Kashag. The High Court, which handled murder cases and other serious crimes, could only be reached through the Kashag. Its judgments were sent via the Kashag to the office of the Dalai Lama for approval and returned with directions for re-evaluation if not approved. The High Court also ensured that punishments were carried out. Below the Kashag were governors' offices each responsible for several districts that usually included more than one village. District offices were staffed by two career officers who were reassigned every few years, two local representatives who served for longer periods, and clerks. The main district responsibilities were tax collection and resolution of local disputes.

The pre-Communist social system had four strata; the clergy, noble families (kudrak), commoners (miser), and 'the inferior kind' (menrig). Family background determined one's opportunities. Members of around 200 noble families who made up about 5% of the population ran the political administration and the great estates. Highest among the kudrak were the yabshi, six families⁵ into which incarnations of the Dalai Lama had been born. Below them were four depon families⁶ who claimed descent from Tibetan Buddhist kings of the 8th century. Next were eighteen midrag families⁷ who held the main political positions and were the financial elite. The remaining 150 or so noble families, the gerpa, had a single estate each and rarely participated in government. Male members of the

⁵ Samdrup Potrang (7th and 9th Dalai Lama), Lhalu (8th and 12th), Yuthok (10th), Phunkhang (11th), Langdun (13th), Takla (14th)

⁶ Doring, Labrang Nyingma, Lhagyari, Ragashar

⁷ Phala, Shatra, Rampa, Surkhang, Horkhang, Changlochen, Tethong, Taring, Shasur, Kungsang, Namseling, Ngabo, Sholkhang, Tsarong, Drumpa, Lhatang, Sarjung, Shegarlingpa

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nobility were divided into seven non-hereditary ranks corresponding to political position, the highest of which was held by the Dalai and Panchen Lamas alone. At the opposite end of the social spectrum the menrig, 7-10% of the population, did work that was improper for Buddhists. They were butchers, fishermen, corpse-cutters and metal smiths⁸. Menrig were considered impure but the kudrak were not pre-eminent by virtue of ritual purity like Hindu Brahmins. They were a politico-economic aristocracy.

The vast majority, the commoners, were farmers or nomads. No matter how you count them, at least 90% of Tibetans were farm workers, nomadic herders, domestic servants, butchers or the like. Chinese estimates from 1959 are that 60% were farmers, 20% nomads, 15% monks and nuns, and 5% officials. Although monks and nuns made up at least 10% and perhaps 15% of the population, 80-90% of those in monasteries were manual workers who might participate in some chants but whose primary role was to support the scholars. In the three chief monasteries, Drepung, Ganden and Sera, 10% to 15% of the monks were dobdos, fighting monks who acted as the Gelug army. Its numbers dwarfed the government's army.

The settled people and many nomads were bound to estates owned by noble families and great monasteries. The monasteries and lay nobility owned at least 50% of Tibet's arable land. Recent Chinese counts say monasteries owned 37% and lay nobles 25% for a combined total of 62% of all arable land. The three major monasteries in Lhasa that housed around 20,000 monks in 1959 owned at least 300 manors and 75,000 serfs. Drepung alone is believed to have had 185 estates, 20,000 serfs, and 16,000 nomads. The abbot of Ganden in his own right owned seven manors and more than 1,000 serfs. Monasteries without large estates were supplied with barley, butter and tea by the central government. The major prayer ceremonies were also supported by government funding. There were more than 6,000 monasteries with a combined population of over 300,000 monks even by the early 1700s but only a few of them were big enough to have powerful and wealthy leaders. There were no powerful nunneries and never more than about fifteen thousand nuns. There were about 6,000 serf-owning families including the nobles, about 20 of whom each owned scores of the estimated 1,000 manors. Palla Manor at Gyantse was an estate of more than 30 manors worked by over 3,000 serfs. The great landowners lived in Lhasa, Shigatse and Gyantse.

Tibetan society was highly stratified. The social rank of the victim, for example, determined the compensation for homicide. The highest rank, for which no amount could be adequate, was the Dalai Lama. If you killed a noble 200 sung (ounces of gold) must be paid. High monks and officials were worth 100 sung, lower officials and tax collectors 80-90 sung, average Tibetans 40-60 sung, and "untouchables" 5-20 sung. In fact, noble families were much more privileged than those differences suggest because they had a monopoly on lay positions in the government. The three great monasteries controlled the other half of the 340 senior official positions. Typically one son from each noble family would take such a position with little or no pay so his family could keep ownership of their estate and maintain their social position.

⁸ Also carpenters, begging musicians and horse-traders.

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A commoner who became a monk could enter the nobility by advancing to a high position in the government and then disrobing and retaining his position. That was quite a widespread practice. The ex-monk would get low-rank noble status and a small estate. If a non-noble woman gave birth to a high-ranking reincarnate lama, a tulku, her whole family was ennobled. Occasionally a commoner befriended by the Dalai Lama or one who became wealthy and influential via trade would be ennobled to hold a government position. A menrig, however, even one who grew wealthy enough to become a taxpayer, was always a menrig. Nobles and commoners interacted socially, especially when young, but menrig were shunned⁹.

The status of the peasants is controversial. The Chinese say they were slaves, others that they were more like free tenant farmers. There were both slaves and free men but it's impossible to know how many of each because too many records were destroyed. Around 45% of all arable land was worked by farmers who held it by deed and paid taxes directly to the government. They were free, but we don't know how many people they had laboring for them who were not free. Some monastic and manorial land was also worked by farmers with deeds. They were free taxpayers (tretpa) while their field hands (mibog) were not. Farmers whose deed precluded their land from being sold were less free than those whose deed allowed it, but how many farmers would want to sell their land, anyway? The duchung, who leased land and did not pay taxes were less free than those with deeds. Serfs tied to the estate where they were born were not free at all. Tax rates ranged between 50% and 80% and tretpa on manorial estates also had labor obligations. That sounds like a great burden but it may not have felt so in a stable, pre-industrial, non-monetized society. A farmer's relationship with his estate owner or tax collector would always have the greatest impact on how he felt about his situation.

The usual arrangement for tretpa was marriage between a woman and all brothers of another land-owning family. That meant one set of children would inherit the property. Monogamy was the nobility's usual practice. They strongly condemned adultery because it led to fighting. Conflict was considered shameful as well as disruptive. Buddhism teaches that conflict results from incorrect vision due to desire, anger, pride, ignorance or another of the root afflictions that poison us. One should, therefore, do nothing that could lead to conflict. Legal disputes reflect on one's piety so Tibetans preferred to settle problems privately. There were associations to establish business practices and resolve disputes, including the Nepalese-Tibetan Traders Association, Tibetan Muslim Association, Committee of Stone Masons and Carpenters, and the Lhasa Beggars Association. Most farming communities had a committee to enact and enforce Green Laws that regulated activities such as fighting, going naked or taking red meat into the fields. Those activities anger demons who would harm the harvests.

The legal code was based on one established by Karma Tenkyong Wangpo who became king of Tsang in 1623. That was Tibet's first true administrative law code. It has several unusual properties. Its language is often advisory rather than definitive. Decisions in civil cases were final only while both parties agreed. A case could be reopened at any time if one party rejected the decision because that meant the true answer had not yet been

⁹ Fjeld found that butcher and blacksmith families were still being avoided in Lhasa in the mid-1990s because they are considered impure.

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found. Precedents were not used because it was considered that no two cases were the same. Judgment had to be made by factoring every relevant issue in each new case. The judge was required to consider the root cause as well as the immediate source of a dispute, meaning the original provocation and the event that precipitated the clash. If, for example, the root cause of a divorce case was deemed to be the wife's adultery years before and the immediate cause was a brawl between the couple, the root would be more significant and the wife would be held responsible for the divorce.

Minor crimes were usually dealt with outside the formal system but serious ones had to be reported to the central government through the district offices. There were severe penalties for not doing so. Serious crimes included murder, treason, arson, major theft, rioting and sorcery. The district officer would send an investigator to gather evidence, document his findings and prepare the case for the Kashag. They would send an official to get the accused and the evidence, and assign one or more judges. The families of the victim and accused were expected to visit the judges to answer questions and bring gifts. The goal was to arrive at an agreed statement of facts. If that did not emerge, judges tested the participants' veracity by oath-taking and dice-rolling, the results of which were believed to be determined by karma. The accused could also be beaten. This long and costly process put poor families at a great disadvantage. The usual punishment was a fine. That penalized the guilty party and compensated the victim. Imprisonment was used almost exclusively during court proceedings, not as a punishment. Punishment for the most serious crimes could include gouging out the eyes, cutting the Achilles tendon, or cutting off the tongue and hands. Chinese propaganda says those practices were frequently used but most researchers are satisfied that such punishment was as unusual as it was cruel.

The monasteries were organized in a hierarchy. Larger ones had satellite monasteries, farms and a complex internal organization. The Three Seats of the Gelugpa, Drepung with over 10,000 monks in 1951, Sera with 7,000 and Ganden with 5,000, were similar to Britain's Oxford and Cambridge universities. Each monk belonged to the equivalent of a college, a semi-autonomous tratsang. Each tratsang was made up of residential sub-units called khamtsen. A difference from the British colleges is that khamtsens were oriented geographically. A monk would enroll in the one for his home region. Each monastery, tratsang and khamtsen was a separate corporate entity that continued across generations and owned property. Because a monk's loyalties were primarily to his khamtsen and tratsang there could be intense rivalry within and between monasteries.

Although the Dalai Lama was Tibet's religious leader his authority could be questioned. The government existed to further religious ends and monks believed it was their duty to intervene if they believed the government was acting incorrectly, especially if it was against their own monastery. There were frequent disputes when Tibet was ruled by Regents because they came from one of the six most powerful tratsangs. Tension was a permanent aspect of the system. There was a bitter dispute in the 1920s, for example, over the 13th Dalai Lama's plan to enlarge the army. The monasteries saw it as a threat to their leadership of the country's defense. The dispute was made worse by the fact that Drepung's Loseling tratsang of four thousand monks supported China when the Dalai Lama's volunteer army was trying to drive their forces out of Lhasa in 1911-1912.

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1.4.2 Contemporary

China says everyone in Tibet is now equal. They tried for a decade after invading in 1949 to communicate socialist ideals to a people whose language had none of the necessary words. After 1959 when the Dalai Lama and most of the government fled to India the land was collectivized and a new class structure was set up that reversed Tibet's traditional social hierarchy. Family background continued to be the organizing principal for all social, political and economic activity throughout Mao's rule. Collectivization compounded by the fruitless attempt to raise rice for China's population where only the traditional barley could grow led to devastating famine. After Mao's death in 1976, China's new leaders tried new policies to change Tibetan society. Collectivization was ended and in the 1980s hundreds of cooperative members of the old elite who were still looked up to were brought back into the government. The monastic hierarchy and the great estates no longer exist but members of some noble families remain privileged. They are categorized as big (chenpo)¹⁰ or small (chungchung). The Ngapo, Shape and Changlochen have been especially successful at gaining prominent new positions. Chungchung families had large estates but did not participate in the central government. They lost their position in society along with their estates.

Tibetans today object to being ruled by a system based on foreign values. Fewer Chinese troops patrol the streets except at times when Tibetans are expected to protest en masse but there is much covert surveillance. Tibetans also object to the influx of Han Chinese who get substantial incentives to relocate¹¹. The best jobs go to them. Access to housing and other needs is via Chinese controlled systems. Those Han settlers are trying for a better life just as American settlers did in the West but the Tibetan people and their culture are no more an incidental casualty than were American Indians and their way of life. It was US and is Chinese government policy to fill "their territory" with their own people. China has always relocated Han people to their frontier. I find myself wondering how I'd feel if Hitler had conquered Britain. England before WW2 offered little to working class folk like my family just as Tibet did to most of its people. Would I say there should have been less cruelty but the result was a better society? Or that the British should have been allowed to change, or preserve, their own culture?

1.5 People - Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Others

To understand Tibetan culture it is important to know the key historical figures, earthly and celestial, who illustrate its aspirations. In Tibetan Buddhism there are infinitely many Buddhas who share a single Body of Absolute Reality and a Form Body with multiple manifestations. The Form Body comprises a single infinite Beatific Body that cannot be perceived by humans and an Emanation Body with countless manifestations in three Forms, Ideal, Incarnational and Artistic. There can be only one manifestation of the Ideal Form in any epoch, Buddha Gotama in ours. There can be any number of

¹⁰ Chenpo with famous ancestors and history include the Lobsang Dargye, Lhalu, Tsarong, Surkhang, Labrang Nyingma, Trimon, Ragashar, Shatrak, Ngapo, Shape and Changlochen.

¹¹ China's 2000 census reports 2.4 million Tibetans (93%) in the TAR with the highest concentration of Han (17%) in Lhasa. For Greater Tibet, defined by the Dalai Lama's office to include the TAR, eastern Kham, Amdo, and more, the PRC reports 5 million Tibetans (68%) while the Dalai Lama's office reports 6 million Tibetans who make up only 44% of the total.

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physical Incarnations of members of celestial Buddha families. Padmasambhava was a human incarnation of celestial Buddha Amitabha. There are also Incarnational Forms of cosmological entities including oceans and mountains. Finally, there can be any number of paintings, statues and so forth that are manifestations of the Artistic Form.

Tibetan Buddhism teaches ways to attain Buddhahood within one or just a few lifetimes. That is greatly facilitated by access to an Incarnational Buddha. Only Tibetan Buddhists expect living Buddhas to manifest. The Buddhism of South Asia has a different structure. There is only one Buddha, a purified being who has departed from this world. Buddha Gotama was his manifestation in this epoch and there were others before him but there will be no more until Buddha Maitreya, the Loving One, comes thousands of years from now. There are saints who are Buddha's disciples. Anyone can become one but they do not have the iconic status of Incarnated Buddhas. Buddhism has nothing you must accept as truth, nothing that will save you if you only believe. You must understand the universe for yourself. Correct understanding will necessarily result in right behavior that will alone determine your future. Tibetan Buddhist practice is based on studying an Incarnation whose example is especially relevant to your stage of development and being trained by someone who is further advanced on the course you are following. Many of the key figures are Incarnations who established a new path.

Nyingma is the original Tibetan Buddhist order. Much of their ritual came from Bon, an earlier religion that was later deemed to be a branch of Tibetan Buddhism and whose priests are known as the 'Black Hats'. The Nyingmapa are the 'Red Hats' (pa means follower). Nyingma lamas are allowed to marry. Nyingmapa means 'the old ones', those who continued the practices introduced by Padmasambhava after Atisha founded the first new order. The Nyingma adopted an idea from Indian philosopher Nagarjuna (c. 150-250 AD) that Buddha Gotama had hidden texts until men became sufficiently enlightened. They claim to have found texts hidden by Padmasambhava.

Kadam and **Kagyu** were the first new orders, both based on teachings of the Indian monk Atisha (982-1054) and Indian mystics Tilopa (988-1089) and Naropa (1016-1100). that were translated by Marpa (1012-1097). Kadam was initiated around 1050 by Dromtonpa (1005-1064) as a reformation that deemphasized magic and required lamas to hold to a higher moral standard including celibacy. Kagyu is a less strict discipline for most of a monk's life but it strongly emphasizes meditating as a hermit, especially in caves. Kagyu was established as a distinct school by Gampopa (1079-1153) the pupil of Milarepa (1052-1135). Milarepa is Tibet's most famous poet and was Marpa's chief student. From Gampopa's teachings evolved the so-called "Four Major" schools, one of which originated the system of reincarnated leaders (the Karmapa) that was later adopted by the Gelug (the Dalai Lama). The young 2nd Karmapa remembered events from the life of his predecessor who died eleven years before and asked to be taken back to his monastery. That was considered proof one can become a Buddha and choose the place of one's rebirth to help others toward enlightenment¹². It also solved the problem of leadership succession for celibate communities. By 1959 there were 1,500 Living Buddhas (tulkus). The **Sakya** order was also established around this time. Its teachings are based on those of Brogmi (992-1072) who studied in India. The first

¹² cf the Roman Catholic belief that the Pope is the successor of Peter the Apostle.

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Sakya monastery was established by Konchok Gyalpo in 1073. Sakya became the dominant sect in the mid-13th century until it was eclipsed three hundred years later by the Gelug. The name originates from the yellowish soil where the first Sakya monastery was built. Sakya means 'tawny earth'. **Gelug**, 'the virtuous order', was developed by Tsongkhapa around 1400 as a less ascetic and more ritualistic evolution of Kadam. The Gelugpa, 'followers of the virtuous order', are the 'Yellow Hats' who became pre-eminent in the mid-17th century under the Dalai Lama.

The most important historical figure is **Buddha Gotama** aka **Sakyamuni Buddha**, the Ideal Buddha in this epoch. Incarnational Buddhas include Padmasambhava, Atisha and Tsongkhapa. As noted earlier, they are manifestations of celestial Buddhas (also known as Bodhisattvas) who incarnate in human form whenever needed. The most important are Chenrezig, Lokeshvara, Tara, Manjushri and Vajrapani. It is easy to become confused. Chenrezig also has a Sanskrit name, Avolokiteshvara. Padmasambhava is known as Guru Rinpoche. The Dalai Lama is an incarnation of Chenrezig. The Panchen Lama and Padmasambhava are incarnations of Opame, whose Sanskrit name is **Amitabha**. Not Sakyamuni but Amitabha is the principal Buddha in East Asian Buddhism while in Tibet Amitabha/Opama is just one of five Buddhas associated with the western direction and his consort is the female form of Avolokiteshvara. To make it worse, the principal incarnations have multiple manifestations to represent different aspects of their being such as wrath and happiness. Guru Rinpoche has eight aspects that look different from each other but similar to other figures. One looks like Vajrapani.

Padmasambhava was a real person whose life stories illustrate what Waddell meant by bombast. The Nyingmapa regard him as the second Buddha. He is revered by all although his statue is most prominent in Nyingma monasteries. Everywhere you go are caves where he meditated, his stone footprints and other relics. He hid texts (termas) including the Tibetan Book of the Dead throughout the Himalayas to be discovered by future treasure-finders (tertons). Many of his most important teachings were discovered by Kagyu and Sakya tertons. He can be recognized in statues and paintings by the trident he cradles in his left arm. Below its prongs are three heads, dry, fresh and rotten, to symbolize the bodies of the Buddhas of the three times. He holds a five-pronged dagger (vajra) in his right hand and a skull-cap vase in his left. He has a curled mustache and is often flanked by his wife the daughter of the king who adopted him when he manifested as an eight-year-old child, and his consort, Trisong Detsen's ex-wife. She was a dakini. They are energetic tantric muses are also known as sky walkers. He also had four other dakinis who helped him convert Tibet's demons into protectors.

Indian sources say Padmasambhava was the son of a king in Uddiyana in Pakistan's Swat Valley or Afghanistan. Terma texts say he manifested as an eight-year-old child in the blossom of a red lotus into which Amitabha had plunged a golden dagger and was adopted by a king who had no sons. When he grew up, married and became king he accidentally killed someone and was banished. He traveled and became a tantric master, returned to teach, was recognized and sent to be burned alive, transformed the fire into a lake and was then recognized as a great teacher. His coming to Tibet was initiated by Chenrezig who shed tears of compassion when he first saw that barbaric land. A goddess was born from his tears. She stole some celestial flowers and was reborn as a human. She had four sons who prayed to be reborn as a king, a scholar, a tantric

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master, and a messenger. Their donkey overheard their prayers and vowed vengeance because they asked nothing for him. One son was reborn as Trisong Detsen (he is also an emanation of Manjushri). Another was Shantarakshita, the head of India's Nalanda Monastery. The third was Padmasambhava. The fourth was Trisong Detsen's messenger who invited the others to Tibet. The donkey was reborn as Trisong Detsen's brother, Langdarma, who assassinated him and tried to reestablish Bon. Trisong Detsen did in fact bring Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava to build Tibet's first Buddhist monastery, Samye, and subjugate his Bon rivals. When Samye was complete Padmasambhava went everywhere in Tibet blessing mountains, lakes and caves and converting demons. Finally, *"he departed for the south western universe of the magical cannibals to help the beings there and protect Earth from their harm"*. He lives there still.

There are many tales of Padmasambhava's adventures. When a demon pelted him with thunderbolts he melted her snow dwelling into a lake that he made boil. She wouldn't give up even when the flesh boiled off her bones so he pierced her right eye with a thunderbolt. Twelve other demons retaliated with thunderbolts and tried to squeeze him between mountains so he blasted the thunderbolts to cinders with his magic finger, upended the mountains onto the demons' dwelling place and flew off. Another demon transformed himself into a mountain-sized white yak, one appeared as a gigantic white snake, three sent hurricanes, one appeared as an old woman with a turquoise cap who rested her head on his lap and brought thousands more demons to surround him, one tried to tempt him with seven thousand gold coins, and there were many more. He defeated most of them and made them guard caves where he hid scriptures. My favorite story is in a different vein. The Guru was thirsty one day, arranged with the wine-seller to settle his bill at sunset and then made the sun stop. There was full daylight for seven days. At last the desperate wine-seller forgave the bill and Padmasambhava allowed the sun to set. He is also credited with inventing beer as an offering to alcohol-drinking deities. Leeches are the chopped up entrails of demons he hacked to pieces.

Atisha has a better documented life. He was a prince in Bengal who after deep tantric studies renounced his throne in 1011 when he was twenty-nine and went to Indonesia with over a hundred disciples. He stayed there studying and teaching for twelve years before returning to India. Seven or eight years later when he was approaching sixty he was invited to Tibet by the king of one of its principalities. He spent thirteen years there and died near Lhasa in 1054. Atisha is the one who established the role of mentor or lama in Tibetan Buddhism. He said a sick person with a sack of medicines would not get better if he didn't know which one to take. Knowing the teachings has little value without a mentor to apply them to a person's unique situation.

Marpa was born into an affluent family, studied in Tibet, Nepal and India, translated a huge quantity of texts and lived as a married householder. His pupil **Milarepa** was born to a wealthy merchant in 1038 but his father died when he was seven and left everything to his brother's care. Brother stole the property and persecuted Milarepa and his mother. She sent him to learn how to destroy people by sorcery. He gained the power to compel hailstorms and destroyed his uncle then became a pupil of Marpa's. To expiate the murder Marpa set him many hard and frustrating tasks that seemed endless. He gave Milrepa no teaching. At last the frustrated pupil stole Marpa's relics (with the help of Marpa's wife) and traded them for instruction by another lama. Marpa called him

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back, initiated him into magic and gave him severe ascetic exercises. Milarepa went home to practice and found his mother was dead. He was attacked by relatives when he begged for food but did not harm them when they refused. Instead he went far away and lived on nettle soup for eighteen years, meditating and composing 100,000 songs.

Tsongkhapa, 'native of the onion country', was the fourth of six sons born in the Tsonka province of Amdo in 1357. He is usually regarded as an incarnation of Manjushri the god of wisdom although some say Vajrapani. The legend is that a sandalwood tree grew where his umbilical cord fell to the ground and each of its leaves had a natural picture of the Buddha. The place was named Kumbum, 'a hundred thousand body images' and Kumbum monastery was built there. Tsongkhapa took lay vows from the 4th Karmapa when he was three and studied at home until he was seven and took his novice vows. His frequent dreams about Atisha were taken as a sign that he would restore the purity of Buddhist teachings as Atisha did. He studied in Amdo until he was sixteen then went to U-Tsang. It's likely he was influenced by Roman Catholic priests living near where he was born, one of whom is said to have had a long nose and piercing eyes. He continued his studies in monasteries in Central Tibet and was acknowledged as a great scholar by the time he was nineteen. He began teaching, writing and doing more retreats in his 20s, took his full vows, and soon had many disciples. He made a four-year retreat with eight close disciples and attained Buddhahood when he was forty-one. He traveled extensively teaching and revitalizing monastic practices. To get him to travel less, his disciples founded Ganden monastery where he established the Gelug order. He most likely based their yellow robes on those worn by Indian mendicant monks and the ritualistic Gelug service on Roman Catholic practices. He lived all his life in Tibet and died when he was sixty two.

Turning to celestial Buddhas, **Avolokiteshvara** is the Sanskrit and **Chenrezig** the Tibetan name for the bodhisattva of compassion, Tibet's patron. Chenrezig means "one who watches with unwavering eye" where "watch" is used in the sense of "look after" as a mother does. He will incarnate until every being is enlightened. After many ages he hoped he had delivered all beings but when he looked down from Mount Meru there were just as many trapped in suffering as when he started. *"The number of beings is infinite"* he thought, *"so no matter how many I enlighten, there will always be an infinite number left."* When he abandoned his mission in despair his head shattered into pieces. He cried out for help. Amitabha transformed the fragments into a stack of eleven heads, ten peaceful and one wrathful. Avolokiteshvara then spent seven days searching for anything he hadn't already tried. He eventually realized his wrathful form could subdue those he had not reached. That is how he came to assume the form of Mahakala, who some say was reincarnated as Mao Tsetung. He also asked Amitabha for a thousand arms and eyes so he could better help the less degenerate community. There are many legends about Chenrezig. One day at the palace Yambulagang a jeweled casket fell from the sky that contained two texts, two seals and a golden stupa. The king did not know what the objects were but had a dream their significance would be made clear after five generations. His fifth successor was Songtsen Gampo, an incarnation of Chenrezig, who established the Tibetan script and had the texts translated.

In one of their innumerable incarnations **Lokeshvara** and **Tara** were father and mother of all Tibetans, he as a monkey and she as an ogre. Lokeshvara is a form of Chenrezig

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who often incarnates as Tibet's ruler with Tara as his queen. Songtsen Gampo who brought Padmasambhava to Tibet and established Buddhism as the state religion is one of the most famous ones. His primary wives, Wencheng of China and Bhrikuti of Nepal, were incarnations of Tara. Lokeshvara also incarnated as Dromtonpa, Atisa's main disciple who recorded all his teachings. Tara is Sanskrit and **Jetsun Dolma** Tibetan for "The Saviouress". She has many forms, the predominant ones being green Tara who is worshipped chiefly in Tibet and white Tara in Mongolia and China. Songtsen Gampo's Nepalese wife was an incarnation of Green Tara. His Chinese wife was one of White Tara. Green Tara is usually represented as a jeweled young Indian woman with a green complexion seated on a lotus with her left leg hanging down. White Tara is seated like a Buddha and has seven eyes, one in the center of her forehead, one on each hand and foot, and the usual pair. **Manjushri** helps people develop wisdom. One of his many incarnations was Trisong Detsen. **Vajrapani**, the Thunderbolt Wielder, represents the power of enlightenment to defeat evil. He, too, has many incarnations. Lokeshvara, Tara, Manjushri, Vajrapani and others can have concurrent incarnations. In addition to his incarnations as ruler, for example, Lokeshvara incarnates as head of the Karmapa and Manjushri as head of the Sakya. Vajrapani's incarnation as Mao Tsetung is only one of many recent living Buddhas. Waddell reports that Napoleon III, the Prince of Wales, and Mr. Gladstone were all regarded as Buddhas of more or less elevated rank.

Gesar of Ling is a semi-legendary figure analogous to Britain's King Arthur. It seems there was a real person born in the Ling area of Kham in the 11th century who came from a shepherd family, built a large army, conquered neighboring tribes and established the State of Ling. Ling is an abbreviation of Dzam-ling, the name for our world. Gesar's deeds fill thirty seven volumes. Like Icelandic sagas they're about the intrigues and battles of a society's founders but they have a more uplifting context. Tibetan drungpas (male) and drungmas (female) were bards who discovered Gesar material as terma (spiritual treasure). The epic seems to have originated in Mongolia before morphing into other versions. Many Nyingmapa consider Gesar to be an aspect of Guru Rinpoche. Gesar's exploits took place in the land of Phrom which he ruled from a city named Rum. In Asia that name used to refer to Byzantium, the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

We can get a sense of how eternal Buddhas and metaphysical cosmology incarnate in our world from Tibet's first monastery. **Samye** is set in a fertile valley of barley fields, pastures, willows and fruit trees 12,500 feet above sea level, an oasis watered by the 18,000 foot snow-covered mountains. It was originated by secular king Trisong Detsen who established Buddhism in Tibet, architected by scholar-priest Santarakshita and its construction was made possible by sorcerer-priest Padmasambhava. Shantarakshita was head of and Padmasabhava taught at Nalanda, Asia's greatest seat of learning. After demons repeatedly destroyed the buildings and created a famine Santarakshita told Trisong Detsen the opposition was too strong for him and advised sending for Padmasambhava. The Guru came, waged war on the demons and made it safe, then Santarakshita returned as architect of the temple complex. He modeled it on a site in India whose mandala design facilitated meditation. Mandalas are divided into quadrants each with an "entrance" and concentric circles separated by "walls". You start in the east or south quadrant and work your way round to end at the center. You study every detail and move on only when it is firmly fixed in your mind. In this way your self will be

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progressively abandoned. That, Buddha taught, is our supremely difficult and necessary task because love of self is the root of jealousy, ignorance and anger and thus of all human suffering. Samye's central temple corresponds to Mount Meru which represents the world as seven Joyless Realms of Great Wailing, Great Darkness, Fire, Smoke, Swamp, Sand and Water with Thorns marking the outer edge. The Realm of Desire where humans live rises from the Joyless Realms. Above our realm is the Realm of Form where the gods live. Above that is the Formless Realm. The central temple is surrounded by four major and eight minor ones that represent continents and two more that represent the sun and moon bordering the earthly world. The entire complex is surrounded by a mile-long wall topped by over a thousand three-foot-high stupas that represent seven mountain chains. A gate in the wall at each cardinal point offers entry to the quadrants each of which contains a massive stupa.

Padmasambhava created manifestations of himself that flew above the Samye site to cast shadows where each building should be placed. When construction resumed it turned out he had not subdued all the demons. Every night they rolled rocks down from the mountains onto the day's work. Then the timber mysteriously ran out. The Guru subdued the boulder-rollers and made them fetch gold as well as more wood. Finally he conquered the most arrogant of all the demons, Pehar Gyalpo, chief of the Five Ferocious Kings, and had a special temple built for him in his new role as head of all the protective spirits. It took five, or perhaps twelve, years to complete the project and the consecration ceremonies were appropriately thrilling. Gods strewed flowers, serpents vomited jewels and nectar fell from the sky. The King erected a pillar proclaiming Buddhism as the state religion. He financed twelve novices from Kashmir and seven young Tibetans to become the country's first monks and sent 108 young Tibetans to train as Sanskrit translators. He established a huge plan of studies along with a massive program of translation and printing. He built additional monasteries, explained the benefits of Buddhism to local chiefs, and began to win over some of the Bon aristocracy.

As the monks and monasteries matured, Padmasambhava was able to spend more time in a cave retreat at the peak of 17,500 foot Chimphu northeast of Samye. When Trisong Detsen's eight year old daughter Pemasel died he carried her there and Padmasambhava brought her back to life. Advanced students came for master classes to perfect their enlightenment. One signified his success by shattering rocks with his *phurba* (ritual dagger), another by transforming his body into a raging fire, one by bringing forth water of eternal life from rocks, another rode on the sun's rays. Chimphu became as important to pilgrims as Samye itself. Santaraksita predicted there would be a conflict between his teaching that enlightenment came from study and the Chinese teaching that it is an instantaneous realization for which one prepares by inactivity. The conflict did come and the king organized a debate at Samye in 792-94 that ended in defeat for China. Padmasambhava stayed in Tibet five more years after Trisong Detsen's forty-year-long reign to advise his son. The new king begged him not to go but at last he gave detailed parting instructions, rode off on a lion or a fine horse and flew to a new mountain where he will remain until the end of the universe. He reportedly predicted that *"when the iron bird flies dreadful times will come. Tibet will be split and its districts divided. Even Samye will be destroyed. The age of weaponry will advance. Tantric yogis will die at the knife blade."* Samye survived the Cultural Revolution but with its golden roof torn off, statues destroyed, paintings desecrated and its library of thousand year old texts

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devastated. Only 180 monks are now allowed in the monastery where thousands once lived and only 80 nuns are at Chimphu.