

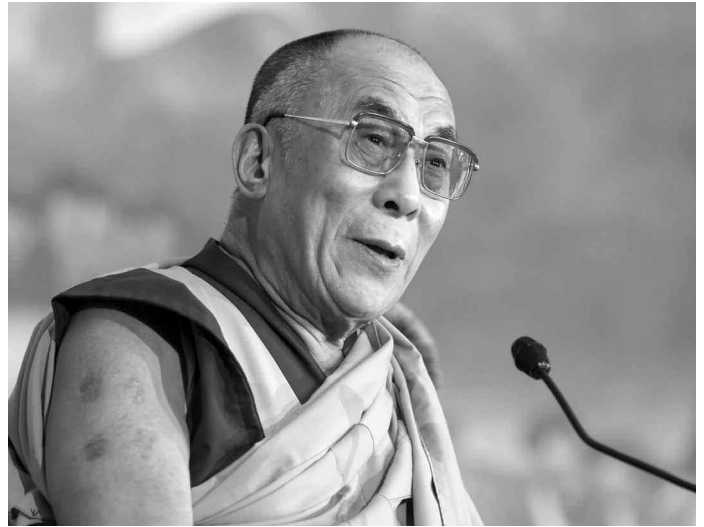
Tibet and the Dalai Lama

“For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain, until then may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world.”

—Eighth century Buddhist saint, Shantideva

HIS HOLINESS THE 14TH DALAI LAMA OF TIBET, TENZIN GYATSO, was born to a peasant family on July 6, 1935 in the village of Takster in the Amdo area of northeast Tibet (present-day Qinghai province). At the age of two he was recognized by a search committee of senior monks and Lhasa officials, in accordance with Tibetan tradition, as the reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama. He was enthroned on February 22, 1940 in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital.

The Dalai Lama is believed to be the manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the protector deity of Tibet who chooses to reincarnate to serve and help ease the suffering of the people. According to Tibet’s unique system, the Dalai Lama serves as both the temporal leader of the Tibetan people and the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. While over the centuries, influence over the Tibetan nation had expanded and contracted according to the ambitions of Tibetan leaders and their Chinese and

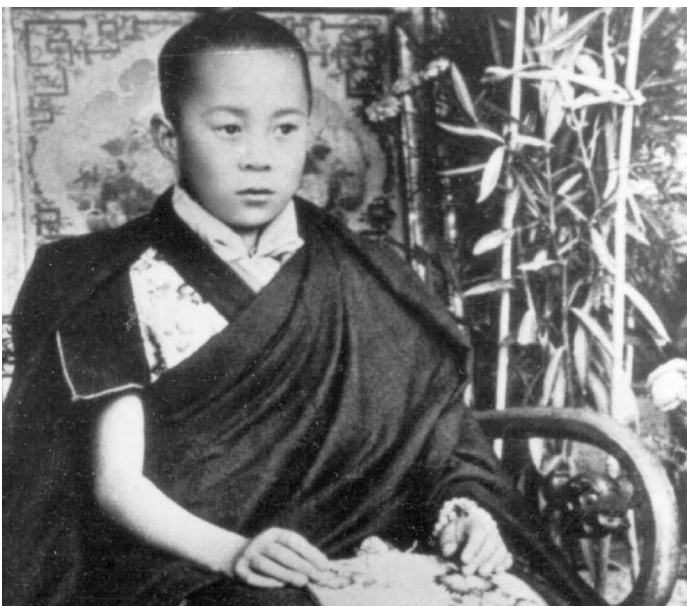


Nobel Peace Prize winner, the Dalai Lama, is acknowledged as one of the world’s greatest men of peace.

Mongolian neighbors, from 1911 Tibet was an independent country, with full control over its domestic and international affairs.

Soon after Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, he announced his intention to liberate Tibet from Western imperialism and, in 1949-1950, the People’s Liberation Army invaded Tibet. The regents in Tibet, who held governmental authority until the Dalai Lama reached his maturity, decided to install the 15-year old Dalai Lama immediately as the country’s temporal leader. In 1951, the Lhasa government sent a delegation for peace talks in Beijing. The delegation was compelled by threat of further military incursions to sign the “Agreement on the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet.” Three years later, the 19-year old Dalai Lama himself traveled to Beijing where he was hosted by Mao. It was during their final meeting that Mao famously told the Dalai Lama, “Religion is poison.”

During the 1950s, thousands fled the implementation of socialist reforms in eastern Tibet, flooding Lhasa, and making the relationship between the Tibetan government and Beijing increasingly untenable. An uprising erupted in 1959, provoked by the fear that an invitation to the Dalai Lama extended by the Chinese garrison in Lhasa would



Early photo of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

result in his kidnapping or worse. The Dalai Lama was forced to flee for his life. Since 1960, he has resided in Dharamsala, India, where he has established a government in exile and implemented a democratic system of governance for the long-staying refugee community numbering around 125,000 Tibetans.

In the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., the Dalai Lama has become one of the great proponents of non-violence and advocated peaceful solutions based on tolerance and mutual respect. For this, he has won the admiration of the world and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal in 2007.

The Chinese government perceives any outward displays of reverence to the Dalai Lama as a form of “splittism,” and those calling for his return to Tibet or caught in possession of his image face harsh punishments from Chinese authorities.