

# Triple Cabinet Crisis

## Study Guide

1949 Tibetan Crisis



**PREPMUN  
2022**



<b>Letter from the Crisis Team</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction: Welcome to Tibet</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>General Information</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Historical Background</b>	<b>5</b>
Origins of Independence: The Tibetan Empire (618 AD-circa 1230)	6
Chinese Control: The Yuan, Ming, and Khoshut (1240-1720)	7
Increased Chinese Control and British Influence: The Qing Dynasty (1720-1912)	8
The Question of Suzerainty: The Republic of China (1912-1949)	9
Chinese Invasion and Annexation: The People's Republic of China (1949-Present)	11
<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>12</b>
Tibetan Nationalism and Sovereignty	12
Tibet's Right to Independence	12
China's Claims: Suzerainty or Sovereignty?	13
National Security	14
Tibet	14
China	14
India	14
Tibet's Challenges: Lack of Modernisation	15
Feudalism	15
Religious Obstacles	15
Unsuccessful Militarisation	16
<b>Conclusion: The Road Ahead</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>18</b>

## Letter from the Crisis Team

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Joint Crisis Committees of PREPMUN 2022!

The document you are currently reading is the Main Study Guide common to all three councils of this year's Crisis. It contains the bulk of the information essential to participating in this year's crisis as an effective delegate. For further information pertaining to your allocated council, please refer to the Council Guide.

We are aware that some of you are new to Crisis. If you are feeling excited about what's to come, we hope to not disappoint. If you are feeling uncertain or anxious due to fearing the unknown or hearing comments from others, we promise that Crisis is not as scary as some others make it out to be. Every Crisis is different, and with it, a new opportunity to learn and have fun. Come with an open heart, an open mind, and an appropriate sense of humour. With these three things, you are sure to take away something from the experience. And at the end of it all, regardless of the outcome, we hope that you may leave with a love for Crisis.

Join us, as we bring you on a journey to a region shrouded in mystique and, during a time of unrest and uncertainty. Will history repeat itself, or will the annals of history be rewritten in this timeline? The choice now lies in your hands. Good luck!

Should you have any questions regarding the study guide, council guides, or dossier, please do not hesitate to email us at [prep22.jcc@gmail.com](mailto:prep22.jcc@gmail.com).

Warmest regards,  
The Crisis Team

*Note: for those unfamiliar with Crisis Committees, events that have occurred after the start date—**1 November 1949**—are assumed to have not yet happened in the timeline and context of our crisis simulation. If you spot sources in this source referring to events beyond our stipulated start date, they are merely illustrations to serve as reference material, not a prediction of future events. Nobody can predict the events of a crisis.*

## Introduction: Welcome to Tibet

November 1st, 1949.

With the Chinese Civil War coming to an end and the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC),<sup>1</sup> the Communist Party of China (or Chinese Communist Party, CCP) has begun to focus on consolidating its territory, with special emphasis on Tibet, Taiwan and Hainan.<sup>2</sup>

Tibet, which had enjoyed *de-facto* independence prior to the rise of the CCP, has become increasingly concerned about potential Chinese incursions into Tibet.<sup>3</sup> However, due to its lack of development compared to China, any attempts by Tibet to remain independent may prove to be futile against China's political and military might.<sup>4</sup>

India, having just gained independence two years prior, was cautious of the situation in Tibet. Under British rule, Tibet was seen as a buffer zone against any external threats from the East—a sentiment held by many members of the newly-established government of India.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, because of British involvement in the region, India served as one of Tibet's only points of contact with the external world. Therefore, as India grapples with the internal challenges which came with its newfound nationhood, China's increasingly aggressive position in Tibet has forced them to watch closely over the situation.

Thus, we find ourselves at a crossroads: will China claim control over Tibet unopposed, or will Tibet trump the odds and fend off Chinese advances? Only time will tell...

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<sup>1</sup> The Chinese Civil War was fought between the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) and Communist Party of China (CPC), with the CPC emerging victorious and its leader, Mao Zedong, proclaiming the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Tseling Shakya, "The Xinhai Revolution and Counter Revolution on the Frontiers of Republican China," *Asia Pacific Memo*, September 22, 2011, <https://apm.iar.ubc.ca/the-xinhai-revolution-and-counter-revolution-on-the-frontiers-of-republican-china/>.

<sup>3</sup> Tseling Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet. Volume 2: The Calm Before the Storm, 1951-1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Claude Arpi, *India Tibet Relations (1947-1962)* (New Delhi (India): Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2017).

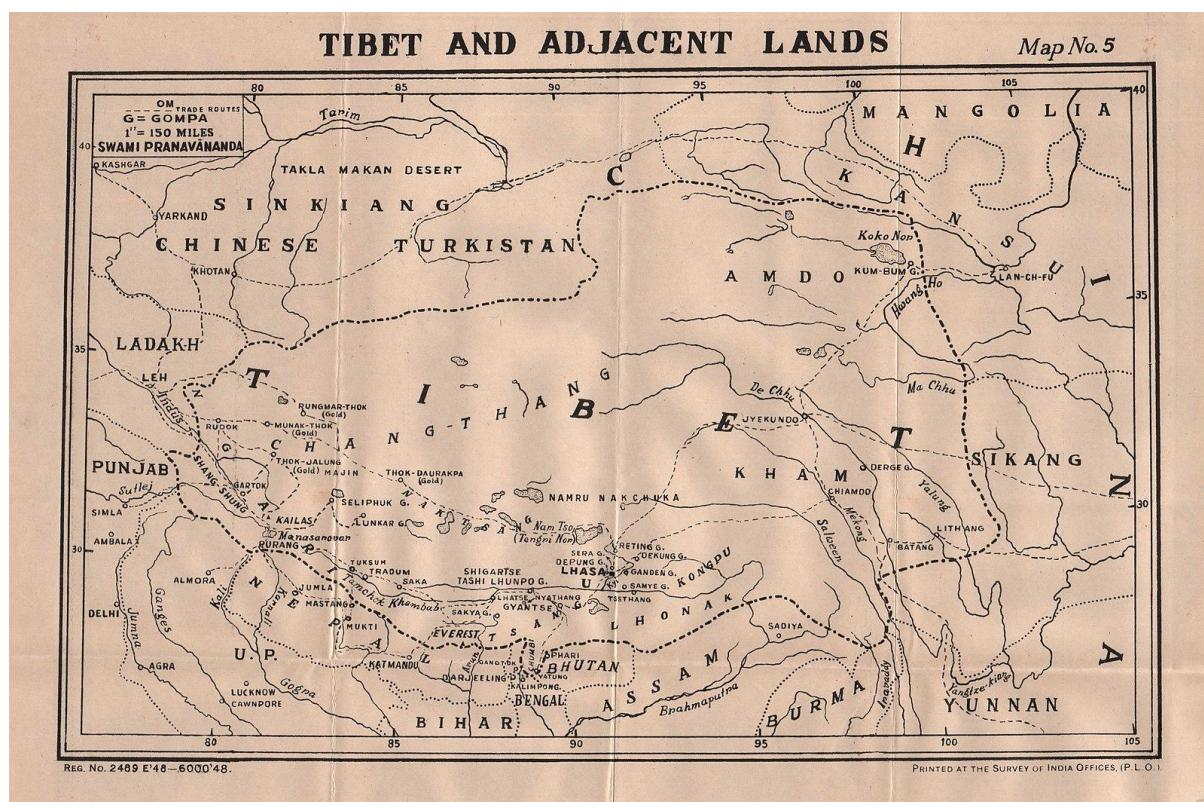
## General Information

This section contains some general information about Tibet. Take note of the map below: Tibet is bordered by China (Gansu, Sikang and Yunnan) to the east, Xinjiang to the North, as well as India, Bhutan and Nepal to the south and west.

*Capital: Lhasa*

*Population: approx. 1,000,000<sup>6</sup>*

*Area: 1,221,600 sq km*



Map of Tibet in 1949 (darkened dashed line demarcates boundary)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Melvyn C Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Public domain image retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1949\\_Survey\\_of\\_India%27s\\_map\\_of\\_Tibet\\_and\\_adjacent\\_lands\\_from\\_Prana\\_vananda%27s\\_book.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1949_Survey_of_India%27s_map_of_Tibet_and_adjacent_lands_from_Prana_vananda%27s_book.jpg)

## Historical Background

This section is intended to give the reader a better understanding of how the issue of Tibet's sovereignty has developed over time. As such, there will be references to incidents and sources post-1949. As such, please be reminded that any mention of events past the start date are merely for reference, and these events have not "happened" yet. Do not use these references to predict events in this Crisis.

Current-day Tibet (in 2022) exists as an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China (PRC), firmly under the control of the CCP government. However, this has not always been the case: from the formation of the Tibetan Empire in 600 AD to its annexation by the Qing dynasty over a thousand years later, Tibet's sovereignty and political status has evolved over the centuries. Therefore, to understand how we have arrived at where we are today, we must look into the past.

### Timeline of Tibet's sovereignty (618 AD-Present)

Year	Tibet	China
618–842	Tibetan Empire	Tang (唐) Dynasty
960-circa 1230	Era of Fragmentation	Song (宋) Dynasty
1240–1354	Sakya Dynasty	Yuan (元) Dynasty
1368–1644	Rule by various Dynastic Families	Ming (明) Dynasty
1720–1912	Rule by Dalai Lama & Central Government (Ganden Phodrang)	Qing (清) Dynasty
1912–1951	Rule by Dalai Lama & Central Government (Ganden Phodrang)	Republic of China (KMT)
1951-present	Tibet Autonomous Region (under the Chinese government)	People's Republic of China (CCP)

Yellow: de-Jure independence

Blue: de-facto independence

Red: under direct rule

### Origins of Independence: The Tibetan Empire (618 AD-circa 1230)

The earliest records of Tibet as a formal entity date back to the early 7th century AD, when the Tibetan king Songsten Gampo of the Yarlung Dynasty unified the territories of the Tibetan

Plateau and founded the Tibetan Empire.<sup>8</sup> During the Tang Dynasty of China, several correspondences between Tibetan and Chinese emperors were recorded, such as the signing of treaties defining territorial borders,<sup>9</sup> as well as arrangements for marriage between the Tang Dynasty and Tibet.<sup>10</sup> These correspondences are proof that Tibet had once existed as an independent nation recognised by the Tang Dynasty, with its own unique ethnic and national identity.



*The Zhol Pillar below Potala Palace, commemorating a border agreement between the Tang and Tibet  
(Wikiwand, n.d.)*

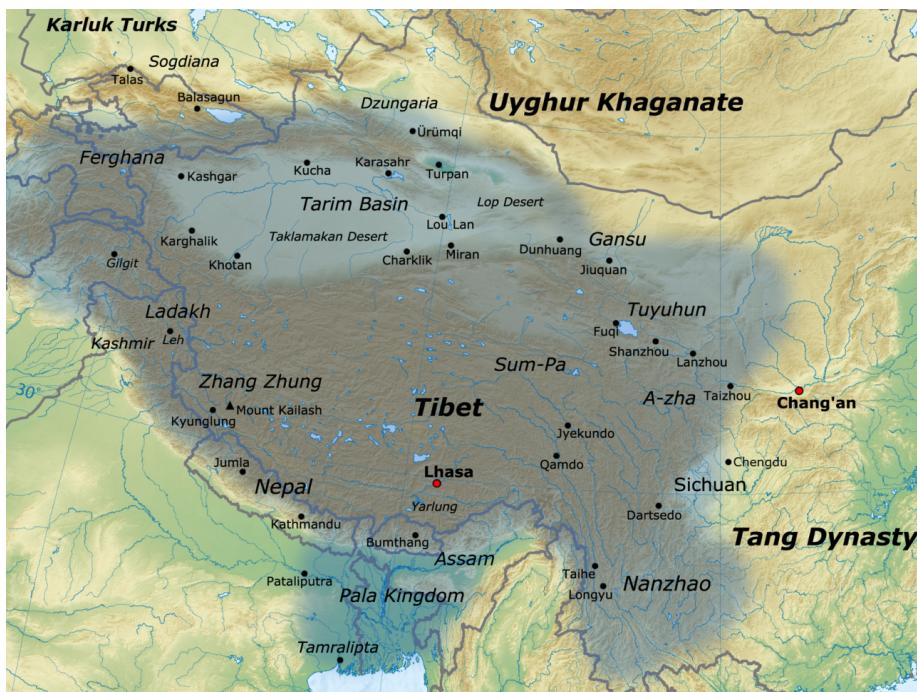
The Tibetan Empire reached its peak in the early 9th century, conquering territories as far west as the Himalayas and Bengal, and east towards the now-Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> H. E. Richardson, "The Sino-Tibetan Treaty Inscription of A.D. 821/823 at Lhasa", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1978): 137–62.

<sup>10</sup> Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, eds., *Sources of Tibetan Tradition, Introduction to Asian Civilizations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Claude Arpi ed. *Glimpses on the History of Tibet*. Second edition (revised), (Dharamsala: Tibet Museum, 2015)



*The Tibetan Empire at its greatest extent, circa 800 AD (Javierfv1212, 2011)*

Upon the death of Emperor Langdarma in 842 AD, the once-expansive empire was fragmented into smaller kingdoms and tribes run by warlords.<sup>12</sup> From then to the rise of the Yuan Dynasty, Tibet went through what is known as the Era of Fragmentation, where there was no central political authority. This also marked the final period of true independence for Tibet, as centuries of Chinese dominion would follow.<sup>13</sup>

#### Chinese Control: The Yuan, Ming, and Khoshut (1240-1720)

Tibet was conquered by the Mongols in 1240, and subsequently directly incorporated into the Yuan Dynasty under the Khagan (emperor), Kublai Khan.<sup>14</sup> Although the Mongols took control of Tibet, they held Tibetan Buddhism in high regard, and thus viewed Tibetan religious leaders as their spiritual teacher rather than their subject.<sup>15</sup> Kublai Khan appointed the Sakya Lama, Drogön Chögyal Phagpa, as the Imperial Preceptor, an extremely important role in the emperor's court; charged with controlling all the Buddhist clergy in the empire, as well as managing the political situation in Tibet.<sup>16</sup> After the death of Kublai Khan, all subsequent Yuan Emperors all had a Tibetan lama as their Imperial Preceptor and spiritual guide, thus

<sup>12</sup> Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 160.

<sup>13</sup> Sam van Schaik, Daozhao, and Imre Galambos, "Manuscripts and Travellers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim" in *Studies in Manuscript Cultures*, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Wylie, Turrell V, "The First Mongol Conquest of Tibet Reinterpreted", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37, no. 1 (June 1977): 103, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2718667>.

<sup>15</sup> Melvyn C Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

demonstrating the special relationship that Tibet had with Chinese emperors, despite being under the control of the Chinese.<sup>17</sup>

Following the collapse of the Yuan Dynasty and the birth of the Ming in 1368, Tibet, while still considered a Chinese vassal state, enjoyed *de-facto* independence. The Ming Dynasty cared little to exert direct control over Tibet but did still exert some form of influence through the granting of prestigious titles such as the Grand Imperial Tutor.<sup>18</sup> Because of the lack of direct control from the Chinese during this period, Tibet was ruled by local dynastic families that held significant political influence. Certain dynasties came close to reunifying the entire Tibetan region, such as the Ringpungpa (1435 to 1565) and the Tsangpa (1565-1642) dynasties, the latter of which is considered the last royal dynasty to rule Tibet.<sup>19</sup>

The downfall of the Ming allowed the Mongols to conquer Tibet again in 1642—this time by Oirats.<sup>20</sup> The Oirats established the Khoshut Khanate, and assisted Tibet in setting up their own central government, the Ganden Phodrang, thus enabling a form of co-existence between the ruling Mongol Khans and Tibetan religious leaders.<sup>21</sup> This lasted until 1720, when the Qing Dynasty reclaimed Tibet as part of imperial China.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, while Tibet had been conquered and controlled by various Chinese dynasties, they ultimately retained varying degrees of autonomy and the Chinese did little to directly interfere with their internal administration. Instead, they viewed Tibet as their spiritual guide and highly respected Tibetan religious leadership.

#### Increased Chinese Control and British Influence: The Qing Dynasty (1720-1912)

Although the Qing Dynasty rose to power in 1636, they only took full control of Tibet in 1720 after defeating the Dzungar Mongols who controlled Tibet at the time. The Qing considered Tibet a vassal state under their direct control, while Tibet continued to view the Qing Dynasty as patrons of their spiritual tutelage (similar to their relationship with the Yuan Dynasty).<sup>23</sup> Although the Dalai Lama was able to rule over Tibet with relative autonomy, their authority was intermittent as the Qing frequently intervened in Tibet's internal affairs, such as the selection of

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<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Uspensky, "The Status of Tibet In the Seventeenth – Early Eighteenth Centuries: A Mongolian Perspective", *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 67, no. 1 (2014): 230-37.

<sup>18</sup> Morris Rossabi, ed. *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Sam Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> The Oirats are a tribe of Mongols native to Siberia, Xinjiang and western Mongolia.

<sup>21</sup> Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 250.

<sup>22</sup> John Vollmer and Jacqueline Simcox, *Emblems of Empire: Selections from the Mactaggart Art Collection*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Elliot Sperling, *The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics*, (Washington, D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2004).

Lamas through the institution of the Golden Urn (see footnote).<sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> Additionally, roughly half of Tibet's existing territory was subsumed under the direct control of Beijing, with officials (called "Ambans") from the Qing court serving as the highest authority in Tibet.<sup>26</sup> Thus, this indicates an increased level of control from the central Chinese authority over Tibet during the Qing dynasty.

Towards the West, the British established Crown Rule over India in 1858, and their interest in Tibet grew as they sought to consolidate their influence in the region to counter Russia's presence. After their mission to Lhasa in 1885 was denied entry into Tibet,<sup>27</sup> the British negotiated directly with China to produce the Convention of Calcutta in 1890, which demarcated a Tibet-India boundary. Tibet, however, refused to accept the agreement as they had been left out of the negotiations, and China, despite having political authority over Tibet, was unable to enforce it.<sup>28</sup> Frustrated with the lack of a settlement, the British sent an expeditionary force to Tibet in 1904 which marched to Lhasa in just eight months, laying waste to any Tibetan forces that stood in its way.<sup>29</sup> The Tibetans were presented with a peace treaty (the Convention of Lhasa) which they accepted with much reluctance, as it obligated Tibet to pay a large sum of money to the British, and also prevented them from having any relations with foreign powers.<sup>30</sup> The involvement of a foreign power in what it considered to be its own territory and the perceived lack of control over the region alarmed the imperial authority in Beijing, prompting them to embark on a campaign to "sinicize" the region, aiming to regain control of Tibet politically, economically, and culturally.<sup>31</sup> However, these attempts had mixed results, as the Qing authorities faced fierce Tibetan resistance and had to resort to the use of force.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, the Qing Dynasty fell in 1912, and the Nationalist Party of China (Kuomintang or KMT) rose to power.

### The Question of Suzerainty: The Republic of China (1912-1949)

Upon the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and the founding of the Republic of China (ROC) by the KMT, the Qing rulers issued the Imperial Edict of the Abdication of the Qing Emperor,

<sup>24</sup> The Golden Urn was a method for selecting Tibetan reincarnations (such as the Dalai Lama) instituted by the Qing Dynasty. Their aim was to regulate the selection of lamas and allow the Qing emperor to have a say in the reincarnation, thus giving the Qing more control over Tibet.

<sup>25</sup> Elliot Sperling, "Reincarnation and the Golden Urn in the 19th Century: The Recognition of the 8th Panchen Lama" in *Studies on the History and Literature of Tibet and the Himalaya*, ed. Roberto Vitali, (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2012), 97–107.

<sup>26</sup> Christiaan Klieger, ed., *Greater Tibet: An Examination of Borders, Ethnic Boundaries, and Cultural Areas* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Parshotam Mehra, *The McMahon Line and After: A Study of the Triangular Contest on India's North-Eastern Frontier Between Britain, China and Tibet, 1904-47* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>28</sup> L. C. Green, 'Legal Aspects of the Sino-Indian Border Dispute', *The China Quarterly* 3 (September 1960): 1042–58, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000026230>.

<sup>29</sup> Alastair Lamb, *Tibet, China & India: 1914 - 1950; History of Imperial Diplomacy* (Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> Lamb, *Tibet, China & India*, 105.

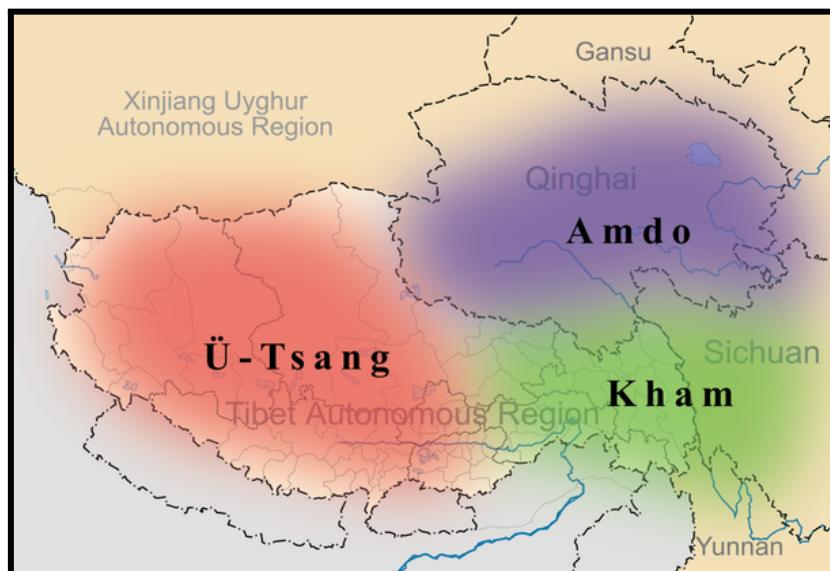
<sup>31</sup> Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snow*, 109.

<sup>32</sup> Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snow*, 219.

recognising the Republic of China as the sole successor to Qing territory—including Tibet. More specifically, the decree read:

“the lands of the five races—Manchu, Han, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan—[which] shall combine to form a great Republic of China.”<sup>33</sup>

In spite of this decree, the 13th Dalai Lama took advantage of the political instability in China and proclaimed Tibet’s independence in 1913, stating that “we are a small, religious, and independent nation”.<sup>34</sup> This, naturally, was not accepted by the new ROC government,<sup>35</sup> so the British convened a conference in Simla, India to settle the status of Tibet (The Simla Convention of 1914). They proposed that Tibet be divided into an “Outer Tibet” and an “Inner Tibet”.<sup>36</sup> Inner Tibet, which included Amdo and Eastern Kham (modern-day Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces), would fall under direct Chinese jurisdiction. Outer Tibet, comprising Ü-Tsang and Western Kham, would remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government at Lhasa. Most significantly, the proposal recognised Chinese **suzerainty** over Tibet, but not **sovereignty**.<sup>37</sup> This meant that while Tibet would remain under China’s jurisdiction, they would be, effectively, self-governed. Unsurprisingly, China refused to agree to the terms of the convention, while the British and Tibetans proceeded to sign it anyway.<sup>38</sup>



Map showing the regions of Ü-Tsang, Kham and Amdo overlaid on modern-day China (Gruschke, 2006)

<sup>33</sup> Gao Quanxi, 政治憲法與未來憲制 (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2016), 273.

<sup>34</sup> Åshild Kolå, “Tibetan Nationalism: The Politics of Religion,” *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 1 (1996): 51–66.

<sup>35</sup> Warren W. Smith, *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> Carole McGranahan, “From Simla to Rongbatsa: The British and the ‘Modern’ Boundaries of Tibet.” *The Tibet Journal* 28, no. 4 (2003): 39–60.

<sup>37</sup> McGranahan, “From Simla to Rongbatsa,” 45.

<sup>38</sup> McGranahan, “From Simla to Rongbatsa,” 58.

In the decades that followed, Tibet functioned as a *de-facto* independent state. China was far too concerned with other internal issues such as political instability and rampant warlordism throughout the country to even attempt to reclaim control of Tibet.<sup>39</sup> This gave the Dalai Lama and Ganden Phodrang (Central Government) the liberty to govern without interference from Beijing until the fall of the KMT to Mao's communists in 1949.

#### Chinese Invasion and Annexation: The People's Republic of China (1949-Present)

*This section contains information past the start date of the Crisis (1 November 1949). As such, do not use it to “predict” future events in the Crisis. Only information up to the start date can be considered “true” to the Crisis.*

After overthrowing the KMT, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was quick to shift its attention towards Tibet.<sup>40</sup> As Tibet stood firm in the defence of its independence, Mao realised that seizing control of Tibet would not be easy, and thus ordered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to prepare to march into Tibet.<sup>41</sup> The United Kingdom and newly-independent India mediated several unsuccessful negotiations between the two parties, and the Chinese eventually presented a 3-point proposal: that Tibet be recognised as part of China, that China be responsible for Tibet's defence, as well as their trade and foreign relations.<sup>42</sup>

To pressure Tibet into agreeing, PLA troops entered Tibet on 7 October 1950, prompting Lhasa to accept the first of China's three propositions—an acceptance that they quickly rescinded after consulting their divine deities, who reportedly stated that Tibet should never fall under the control of a foreign power.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, having recognised their weak position against Chinese forces, the Tibetans unwillingly accepted China's terms in May 1951 (which had now expanded into a 17-point list from the original three).<sup>44</sup> Thus, for the first time in history, Tibet recognised Chinese sovereignty over their territory, and allowed Chinese forces to enter and control Tibet.

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<sup>39</sup> Tom Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet* (New York: Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>40</sup> Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snow*, 199.

<sup>41</sup> Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snow*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Goldstein, *The Calm Before the Storm*, 89.

<sup>43</sup> Goldstein, *The Calm Before the Storm*, 90.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Laird and Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, *The Story of Tibet: Conversations with the Dalai Lama*, 1st ed (New York: Grove Press: 2006).

## Key Issues

### Tibetan Nationalism and Sovereignty

In general, nationalism is the political movement that holds that a nation should be congruent with the state.<sup>45</sup> A nation is composed of people who share common social characteristics such as culture, ethnicity, geographic location, language and religion, whereas a state refers to the government institutions and political frameworks established to govern groups of people.<sup>46</sup> Hence, having a distinct national identity may not necessarily equate to the right to governing a state. Nationalism thus calls for people with distinct national identities to be able to govern themselves, free from the influence and control of external parties—as is the case with the Tibetan independence movement.<sup>47</sup>

### *Tibet's Right to Independence*

As we learnt in the previous section, Tibet existed as its own empire thousands of years ago, with its own language, religion, and ethnic identity, distinct from China and the surrounding regions. While nationalism itself is a modern concept, the desire of the Tibetan people for self-determination and independence has existed since the beginning of Chinese control over Tibet.<sup>48</sup> However, as mentioned, having a national identity is not necessarily equivalent to the right to self-determination. Thus, the significant transformations of Tibet's political status throughout history—including outright independence, Chinese dynastic rule and different degrees of autonomy—make the issue of Tibetan independence a complicated one.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, while Tibet has acknowledged China's jurisdiction since the Yuan conquest of Tibet in 1240 AD, it generally maintains that it is self-governed, free from China's direct control. Furthermore, Tibet has always viewed their relationship with China ever since the Yuan Dynasty as that of priest and patron, whereby Tibet was the spiritual guide, and China the protector of Tibetan lands.<sup>50</sup> Although this relationship was less relevant during the Qing Dynasty and subsequent rule of the KMT, Tibet continued to believe in their right to govern their own lands.<sup>51</sup> This view was articulated by the 13th Dalai Lama in 1913, who stated that:

*“During the time of Genghis Khan and Altan Khan of the Mongols, the Ming dynasty of the Chinese, and the Qing Dynasty of the Manchus, Tibet and China cooperated on the basis of benefactor and priest*

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<sup>45</sup> Iain McLean, and Alistair McMillan. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. 3rd ed. Oxford University Press, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199207800.001.0001>.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/question/What-is-the-difference-between-a-nation-and-a-state>

<sup>47</sup> Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*. Politics and Culture: A Theory, Culture & Society Series. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 1996.

<sup>48</sup> Warren W. Smith, *China's Tibet: The Transformation of Tibetan National Identity* (Radio Free Asia).

<sup>49</sup> Warren W. Smith, *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>50</sup> Lee Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet: Unlocking the Secrets of the Land of the Snows*, (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1996).

<sup>51</sup> Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 99.

*relationship. [...] the existing relationship between Tibet and China had been that of patron and priest and had not been based on the subordination of one to the other.*<sup>52</sup>

Recognition of Tibet's self-determination by foreign powers was also evident in the Lhasa and Simla Conventions of 1904 and 1914 respectively, where the British directly negotiated a boundary agreement between India and Tibet, and explicitly limited its recognition of Chinese control over Tibet to suzerainty, not sovereignty.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, although the Chinese conquest of Tibetan lands cannot be denied, their extent of their authority over Tibet is disputed.

#### *China's Claims: Suzerainty or Sovereignty?*

The PRC disputes Tibet's claims for self-determination, arguing that China has held control of Tibet since the Yuan Dynasty, with sovereignty over Tibet passing through the hands of the following dynasties and governments that ruled China.<sup>54</sup> The main basis for this argument is the 1912 Imperial Edict of the Abdication of the Qing Emperor, which effectively transferred all the territories of the Qing Dynasty, including Tibet, to the newly-formed Republic of China, who subsequently surrendered control of these lands to the PRC.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, the Qing rulers had explicitly repudiated Britain's recognition of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet, while the PRC asserts that China has maintained jurisdiction over Tibet in spite of any agreements made between Tibet and the British Empire.<sup>56</sup> It can also be said that Tibet has received minimal international recognition of its independence. By 1949, the only state that had fully recognised Tibet's sovereignty was Mongolia, who had only gained independence recently themselves.<sup>57</sup> Britain, and by extension, India, while acknowledging Tibet's autonomy from China, but did not recognise their sovereignty in full.<sup>58</sup> Thus, it can be seen that China's claims can be supported with historical evidence, although the strength of the evidence can be questioned.

#### National Security

National security is a major concern for all parties involved in the Tibetan issue: Tibet itself, China, as well as India. While each country's concerns are unique, they are all deeply invested in this issue, fanning the flames of conflict and tension.

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<sup>52</sup> Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 101.

<sup>53</sup> "Treaties and Conventions Relating to Tibet", Tibet Justice Centre, accessed 10 October 2022, <http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties16.html>.

<sup>54</sup> "History of Tibet" china.org.cn, accessed 11 September 2022, [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2008-03/21/content\\_13268563.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2008-03/21/content_13268563.htm).

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric Van Young, eds., *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, World Social Change (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> "I. Ownership of Tibet", china.org.cn, accessed 15 September 2022, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/tibet/9-1.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> Parshotam Mehra, "The Mongol-Tibetan Treaty of January 11, 1913", *Journal of Asian History* 3, no. 1 (1969): 1–22.

<sup>58</sup> Dibyesh Anand, "Strategic Hypocrisy: The British Imperial Scripting of Tibet's Geopolitical Identity", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 1 (2009): 227–52.

### *Tibet*

Tibet is naturally worried about the security and integrity of their country and their people—annexation by the Chinese would mean the potential erosion of their culture, customs, and way of life.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Tibet stands firm in its belief that it is independent of China, and the Tibetan people are willing to defend their sovereignty with their lives.<sup>60</sup>

### *China*

Meanwhile, China's principal considerations regarding Tibet was the buffer zone that it would provide against India, Nepal and Bangladesh, owing to the natural defensive attributes of the Himalayan mountain range.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese believe that it is of utmost importance to uphold their territorial integrity against what they claim to be "imperialist" forces.<sup>62</sup> In the long-term, Tibetan resources—namely water and minerals—are of economic significance to China's growth.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Tibet was of social, political and economic significance to China, which explains why the CCP government has been so intent on reclaiming it ever since their rise to power.

### *India*

India, although not directly involved, also has significant concerns regarding Tibet: historically, the British had made sure to keep Tibet out of the hands of other Western powers competing against them in the region (in particular, Russia), as they saw it as a threat to their sphere of influence.<sup>64</sup> While the newly-independent India does not share similar colonialist sentiments, they do indeed consider Tibet a buffer zone against China—against the backdrop of rising communist threats from within, having a communist-ruled state as their direct neighbour was an understandably uncomfortable position for India.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, China's aggressive position towards Tibet has put India's centuries-old relationship with Tibet to the test. Not only were the two countries similar in religion, but they also had close economic ties, and China's rise poses a crucial dilemma for India: should they stick by their old ally, or support a rising power and potential partner?<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, regardless of the choice that India makes, their primary concern was to maintain peace and stability in the region to allow them to find their footing as a newborn nation.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 189.

<sup>60</sup> Goldstein, *The Calm Before the Storm*, 101.

<sup>61</sup> George Friedman, 'Chinese Geopolitics and the Significance of Tibet', Rane, accessed 15 October 2022, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/article/chinese-geopolitics-and-significance-tibet>.

<sup>62</sup> Nina Shen Rastogi, 'Why Does China Care About Tibet?', *Slate*, 28 March 2008, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2008/03/why-does-china-care-about-tibet-and-when-are-monks-allowed-to-get-violent.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> L L Mehrotra, "India's Tibet Policy: An Appraisal and Options", (New Delhi: Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> Subir Bhaumik, "Ethnicity, Ideology and Religion: Separatist Movements in India's Northeast", 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Arpi, *India Tibet Relations*, 67.

<sup>67</sup> "Indo-China Relations: History and India's Foreign Policy," Adda247, last modified July 27, 2022, <https://currentaffairs.adda247.com/indo-china-relations/>.

### Tibet's Challenges: Lack of Modernisation

The late 19th Century and the early 20th Century were periods of rapid growth and development across the world.<sup>68</sup> However, while innovations and advancements were spread across the world, the geographically-isolated Himalayan region lagged behind as their treacherous terrain made it near-impossible for traders and travellers to bring goods and ideas to Tibet.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Tibet's traditionalist leaders were actively resistant to change and revolution, which resulted in a lack of modernisation.<sup>70</sup> This has placed Tibet in a disadvantageous position compared to China, whose military and political power has been steadily growing over the past few decades.<sup>71</sup>

### *Feudalism*

Tibetan society is structured along feudal lines, with religious leaders forming the aristocracy, while the uneducated working-class sat at the bottom of the social ladder.<sup>72</sup> Social mobility is thus an issue of religion, as the social hierarchy was dominated by leading monks, while the lower classes worked on estates owned by either the religious nobility or the central government as farmers.<sup>73</sup> Although some academics classified Tibetan society as a serfdom, other academics have noted that the lower class workers had certain levels of liberty and could also earn income.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, even though the 13th Dalai Lama enacted reforms to redistribute some of the land owned by the nobility, there still exists a considerable amount of resistance from the aristocracy against such reforms.<sup>75</sup> Hence, it is clear that the monopolisation of power in the hands of an exclusive group was an impediment to Tibet's growth, as it makes it extremely difficult for the lower classes to climb up the social ladder.

### *Religious Obstacles*

Religion and politics in Tibet are deeply intertwined, evidenced by the fact that the Dalai Lama serves as both the spiritual leader and the head of government. Furthermore, Tibetan society is organised along religious lines: villages are built around local monasteries, who report to a district monastery, which in turn answer to Tibet's three major monasteries.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the religious institution plays a major role in everyday Tibetan life, and consequently, religion factors heavily into decisions made by the government.<sup>77</sup> This is especially evident when it comes to the issue of

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<sup>68</sup> "The Industrial Revolution in Europe - ERIH." Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.erih.net/how-it-started/the-industrial-revolution-in-europe>.

<sup>69</sup> Wim van Spegen, "The Geo-History of Long-Distance Trade in Tibet 1850-1950," *The Tibet Journal* 20, no. 2 (1995): 18–63.

<sup>70</sup> Goldstein, *The Calm Before the Storm*, 99.

<sup>71</sup> Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 55.

<sup>72</sup> Luo Jia, "Reform in Tibet as a Social Movement" (MA diss., University of Toronto, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Alex McKay, *The History of Tibet: The modern period: 1895-1959, the encounter with modernity* (Routledge Curzon, 2003)

<sup>74</sup> Donald S. Lopez Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Luo, "Reform in Tibet as a Social Movement" 69.

<sup>77</sup> Luo, "Reform in Tibet as a Social Movement" 70.

modernisation and reform. In the 1910s, the 13th Dalai Lama, realising the need for change, pushed for a slate of social, political and economic reforms—including the introduction of electrical power, setting up banking systems, as well as healthcare reforms.<sup>78</sup> Most notably, he set up modern, non-religious schools to provide an alternative for students who did not want to become monks, but was met with heavy resistance from the religious institution. His death in 1933 effectively put an end to any hopes of further reforms, as the traditionalist regent Reting Rinpoche took over his role as the head of government.<sup>79</sup> Tsipön Lungshar, one of the Dalai Lama's ministers, attempted to introduce a series of progressive political reforms including the institution of elections for government positions, but he was arrested by the Reting Rinpoche and blinded as a punishment.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the sway of religion on the Tibetan socio-political landscape is an evident obstacle to reform and modernisation.

#### *Unsuccessful Militarisation*

It is untrue to say that Tibet did not attempt to modernise its military: since its founding in 1913, the Tibetan Army has gone through periods of transformation and improvement.<sup>81</sup> Most significantly, arms production factories were set up in an attempt to achieve self-sufficiency in firearm procurement. However, locals lacked the expertise and resources to produce high-quality weaponry, and thus, the government had to rely on external sources for the bulk of their firearms.<sup>82</sup> Britain in particular was a major source for the Tibetan Army's weapons, although the British, like several other exporters, was reluctant to give away weapons in large amounts.<sup>83</sup> Following the death of the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933, modernisation and expansion of the armed forces has slowed down significantly under the regent Reting Rinpoche, who opposes militarisation.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, by 1949, the Tibetan Army has undeniably become a modern force using modern equipment, however, where it pales in comparison with the PLA is in terms of sheer numbers, and expertise.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Luo, "Reform in Tibet as a Social Movement" 71.

<sup>79</sup> Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, 190.

<sup>80</sup> Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, 191.

<sup>81</sup> Parshotam Mehra, "Tibet and Its Army", *The Tibet Journal* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 33-60.

<sup>82</sup> Alice Travers, "From Matchlocks to Machine Guns. The Modernisation of the Tibetan Army's Firearms Between Local Production and Import (1895-1950)", *Journal Annali di Ca' Foscari Serie orientale* 57, (2021): 981-1044

<sup>83</sup> Roger E. McCarthy, *Tears of the Lotus: Accounts of Tibetan Resistance to the Chinese Invasion, 1950-1962* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 1997).

<sup>84</sup> Travers, "From Matchlocks to Machine Guns", 1041

<sup>85</sup> Goldstein, *The Calm Before the Storm*, 90.

## **Conclusion: The Road Ahead**

Tensions in the Himalayan are reaching a boiling point. As the governments of the three countries jostle to protect their interests, the questions of sovereignty, national security and identity come into play—there appears to be no easy solutions which would satisfy all three parties. The road ahead is a complicated one: would a diplomatic compromise be reached between the parties involved, or would a solution to the crisis require military action? As events on the Tibetan plateau unfold, the world watches in bated breath. Tibet's fate is in your hands.

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