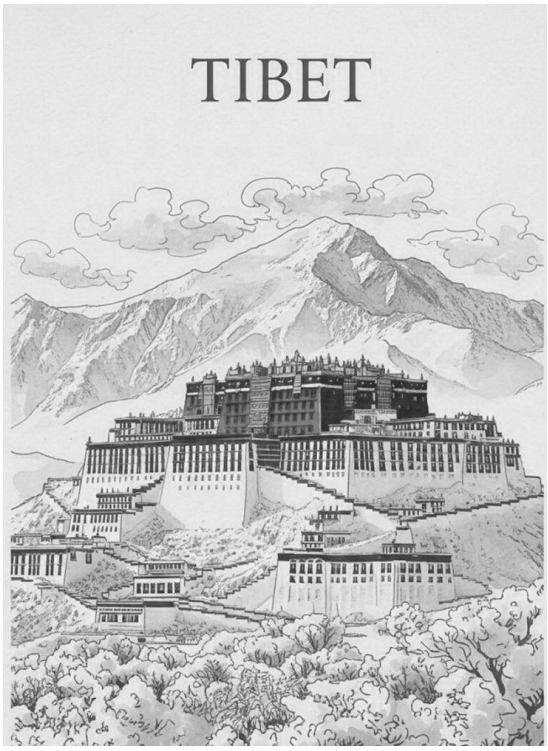
China and Tibet

China Invades and Begins Rule of Tibet

A Summary

In October 1950, the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao Zedong, invaded Tibet, claiming it as part of China following the earlier expulsion of Chinese Nationalist forces. Initially, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) adopted a conciliatory approach, respecting Tibetan religious practices (Buddhist), and allowing the return of the Dalai Lama, (spiritual head). However, relations soured, and by 1954, discontent among Tibetans grew, leading to armed resistance. A brutal crackdown by Chinese forces followed the uprising in 1959, resulting in significant human rights abuses, including the destruction of monasteries and forced relocation of Tibetans. The Chinese government's efforts to modernize Tibet involved substantial infrastructural changes, yet these often benefited Han Chinese settlers disproportionately, leaving many native Tibetans in poverty. The resistance to Chinese rule persisted, highlighted by the Dalai Lama's exile and international condemnation of China's policies in Tibet. The Tibetan struggle has drawn global attention, emphasizing issues of cultural preservation, human rights, and environmental impact.

https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/china-invades-and-begins-rule-tibet





China's Occupation of Tibet

China has illegally occupied Tibet since its annexation in 1951, tightening its repressive rule while refusing since 2010 to negotiate with Tibetan leaders and representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.



What you need to know

Tibet was an independent, self-governing state before the Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) invaded it in 1949. After the PLA defeated the small Tibetan army, China forced Tibetan government representatives to sign the "17-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet" under duress in May 1951. The Dalai Lama escaped into exile in India in 1959 and the Chinese Communist Party's repressive occupation and control of Tibet continues to this day.

LLEGAL OCCUPATION

International law prohibits the acquisition of a territory by force and affirms the right of people to self-determination. China's military invasion and continued occupation of Tibet are in direct violation of international law and agreements on sovereignty and autonomy and constitute an illegal occupation.

CHINA'S FORCED ASSIMILATION POLICIES

China's repressive assimilation policies target the foundations of Tibetan identity by prioritizing Mandarin over Tibetan-language education, requiring the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism, and recasting Tibet's history, culture, and identity through Chinese state-approved narratives.

TIMELINE

1911-1949

Tibet was a fully independent state during this period, which ended when the People's Liberation Army invaded and illegally occupied Tibet.

1951

The year China illegally annexed Tibet

1959

After the Dalai Lama was forced to escape into exile (to India), and China dissolved the Tibetan government, the United States passed a joint Congressional resolution listing Tibet as a country whose national independence had been violated.

2024 The Resolve Tibet Act

Enacted in 2024, the *Resolve Tibet Act* made it official U.S. policy that Tibet's legal status must be determined under international law. The law affirms Tibetans' right to self-determination and calls for the dialogue between the People's Republic of China and Tibet, encompassing issues of governance, autonomy, human rights, and cultural preservation,

A history of sovereignty and self-rule

2,000 YEARS OF HISTORY

Tibet has a unique history that dates back more than two millennia. Chinese records from centuries ago refer to Tibet as a strong state that China had to interact with on an equal footing.

In 821–822, the Tibetan Empire and China under the Tang Dynasty concluded a formal peace treaty defining their frontier and pledging mutual nonaggression. Preserved in Tibetan and Chinese on a stone pillar in Lhasa, the treaty documents Tibet conducting state-to-state relations with China as a distinct political power.

UNDISPUTED INDEPENDENCE

Tibet's history as an independent, self-governing state is irrefutable and firmly established by historical record. There is no serious academic debate about the historical independence of Tibet, nor any basis for Beijing's claim that Tibet has been an inseparable part of China since antiquity. Tibet's documented record as a distinct state and political entity, with its own government, laws, language, foreign relations, and treaty-making authority, long predates the People's Republic of China.

Questions and answers

Why did China invade and occupy Tibet?

China invaded Tibet in 1950 to bring the country under the newly formed People's Republic of China, consolidate control over a strategically important frontier, secure its geopolitical borders, spread its communist ideology, and advance the Chinese Communist Party's expansionist agenda. The Chinese government portrayed Tibet as a historically Chinese territory requiring "liberation" by and "unification" with the motherland. Tibetans rejected that claim, and on March 10, 1959, thousands rose up against China's occupation in a historic national uprising.

Was Tibet an independent nation prior to the Chinese invasion?

Yes. Tibet operated as an independent, self-governing nation before the Chinese invasion of 1949. It maintained its own government, laws, taxation, currency, army, postal system, and external relations.

What was the "17-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet"?

The 17-Point Agreement was a 1951 accord which Tibetan representatives signed under duress, accepting Chinese sovereignty in exchange for promises of keeping the Tibetan government's authority over religion, language and political institutions intact. The agreement provided guarantees to respect mutual needs and establish a relationship between the two governments.

Eight years after the Agreement was signed, in March 1959, tens of thousands of Tibetans were killed after they rose up against Chinese rule in an attempt to protect the Dalai Lama and defend their freedoms. Both the Tibetan and Chinese governments rejected the Agreement, and cooperation effectively concluded with the Dalai Lama's escape into exile.

Who is the Delai Lama?

The Dalai Lama is the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism.

When and why did the Dalai Lama escape Tibet?

The Dalai Lama escaped into exile in India in March 1959, nine years after China invaded and occupied Tibet. His escape followed a national uprising against Chinese rule and a subsequent military crackdown in Lhasa.

He undertook a gruelling, dangerous two-week trek across the Himalayas on foot and horseback. On March 31, 1959, he successfully crossed the border into India, where he was granted political asylum. He has lived in exile in Dharamshala, India, ever since. After reaching India, he formally repudiated the "17-Point Agreement" and reestablished the Tibetan government in exile, now known as the Central Tibetan Administration.

How is Tibetan culture and daily life impacted by Chinese rule?

Tibetan culture and daily life are heavily restricted under Chinese rule, which relies on a policy of forced assimilation and intense surveillance.

Independent watchdog Freedom House consistently ranks Tibet among the least free regions in the world, with a "Global Freedom Score" of 0/100. The Chinese government imposes severe restrictions on the Tibetan people's political rights and civil liberties, suppressing dissent and enforcing assimilationist policies aimed at erasing Tibet's distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage.

While Beijing points to its massive investments in infrastructure, railways, and economic modernization as evidence of "peaceful liberation," a vast majority of the benefits from these development projects flow mostly to the Han Chinese and operate alongside Beijing's forced-assimilation policies that seek to erode Tibet's distinct national identity.

https://savetibet.org/foundational-information/chinas-occupation-of-tibet/

Activities

1. Draw a rough map of Tibet based on the map on page 2.

2. Which countries surround Tibet?

3. Make an expanded time line of the history of Tibet, from 821 to the present.

4. Why do you think Tibet has a "Global Freedom" score of 0/100? Explain how the Tibetans are suppressed.

5. What was the main motive for China's occupation of Tibet?

6. Why were thousands of Tibetans killed in March 1959?

7. Explain the International (global) interest there is concerning the injustice shown towards the Tibetans.

8. Who currently governs Tibet?