



Tibet — Va-PoReg Country Report

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09/24/1720 Start Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under China, Autocratic Monarchy]: In 1720, the Qing Dynasty had started a military expedition to occupy Tibet and to expel the invading forces of the Dzungar Khanate. The Qing installed a new Dalai Lama.¹ During the 18th and 19th centuries, Tibet was regarded a “fanshu” which translates to “vassal state”. During the Qing occupation, Tibet held differing amounts of autonomy. At the end of the 19th century, the Qing held practically no sovereignty over Tibet. Tibet could rather be seen as a self-governing protectorate. The inner state regime was headed by the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatsu, in Lhasa.² Tibet was ruled according to the Tibetan Dual System of Government. This traditional system was a diarchal government initially consisting of the co-rule of the spiritual leader (Dalai Lama) and the worldly “temporal” ruler (Desi). However, the Desi was abolished by the seventh Dalai Lama in 1751. Worldly and religious rule were merged onto the Dalai Lama who became the sole ruler of Tibet.³ Instead, the Kashag, the governing council of Tibet. The Kashag presented opinions to the office of the first minister. The first minister then presented these opinions to the Dalai Lama. Its responsibilities were laid out in the 1751 13-Article Ordinance for the More Effective Governing of Tibet.⁴ While the classification of the inner state regime in Tibet during Qing rule is ambivalent, we code it as an autocratic monarchy considering the absolute power vested in the Dalai Lama who is not elected by the people. Undeniably, power is not passed on through monarchic descentance but rather through a process of searching for his reincarnation (phowa).⁵ LIED does not provide data for Tibet.

12/11/1903 End Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under China, Autocratic Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]: On this date, Great Britain invaded Tibet.⁶ The British had become increasingly aware of the Russian Empire’s ambitions in the East. The so-called Younghusband expedition was aimed at countering this. When the British reached Lhasa, the Dalai Lama had already fled first to Mongolia and then to China. The British troops easily beat the Tibetans and forced the remaining officials to sign the Convention of Lhasa.⁷

09/07/1904 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by China, Autocratic Monarchy]: On this date, the Convention of Lhasa was signed.⁸ With certainty that China would not allow any third country (namely Russia) to interfere with the Tibetan administration, the British retreated to Sikkim.⁹ On 04/27/1906, the Sino-British Treaty was signed. It was a follow up to the Convention of Lhasa and reaffirmed China’s possession of Tibet.¹⁰ With this Treaty, the Chinese government started to take control over the Tibet’s policy on foreigners, continuing the yearlong exclusion of any foreign entry into the country. The directive dispatched to Tibetan officials served solely to showcase Chinese sovereignty in Tibet. The Chinese government aimed to convey its position as the supreme authority in Tibetan affairs, both within Tibet and on the international stage (Schweiger 2015: 339). At the end of 1908, the Dalai Lama returned to Tibet, in order to structure his government. However, the Chinese government sent a military expedition under Zhao Erfeng in 1910 to reintegrate Tibet into China.¹¹ With this expedition began the forced Sinicization of Tibet which, beforehand, had been tolerated in remaining Tibetan traditional ways of living. In order to safeguard its interests, it executed a strategy of integrating Tibet into the broader framework of China politically, economically, and culturally between 1905 and 1911.¹² After the Chinese Invasion of 1910, the Dalai Lama was forced to flee to India.¹³

10/10/1911 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by China, Autocratic Monarchy]/Start No Central Authority: On this date, the 1911 revolution erupted in China.¹⁴ Zhao's soldiers of the punitive expedition to Tibet mutinied and beheaded him.¹⁵ A series of mutinies, the collective of which is referred to as the Xinhai Lhasa Turmoil, followed.¹⁶ The revolutionary forces of the Xinhai Revolution sought to bring an end to the Qing dynasty. On 11/01/1911, the Qing court appointed Yuan Shikai as prime minister in an attempt to negotiate with the revolutionaries and manage the political crisis. At the same time, revolutionary elites established a separate center of power in Nanjing, where Sun Yat-sen was elected provisional president of the Republic of China on 01/01/1912. No coalition government was formed. Instead, the transition was characterized by a period of dual authority between the Qing court in Beijing, represented by Yuan Shikai, and the revolutionary provisional government in Nanjing.¹⁷ We code this event as a voluntary exit in our regime change events typology, since the collapse of direct Chinese rule resulted from mutiny and the subsequent withdrawal of occupation forces rather than from an executive takeover or a popular uprising.

02/12/1912 End No Central Authority/Start Autocratic Monarchy: This date marked the end of the 1911 revolution. The Qing Dynasty had fallen.¹⁸ The Dalai Lama returned to Tibet in July 1912. He expelled the Amban (Qing representatives) and all Chinese forces.¹⁹ In 1913, the Dalai Lama declared that Tibet was an independent nation. The claim to independence was not officially recognized by all countries. Nevertheless, it is agreed upon that Tibet enjoyed de facto independence during this period.²⁰ In 1949, after the protests of the Kuomintang and the communists in China, the Dalai Lama expelled all Chinese nationals connected with the Chinese government for fear of communist control.²¹

10/07/1950 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by China, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, Chinese forces invaded the Tibetan Chamdo province. By 10/19/1950, 5000 Tibetan soldiers had surrendered to the People's Republic of China (PRC).²²

10/24/1951 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by China, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of China, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, the 14th Dalai Lama ratified the Seventeen Point Agreement via telegraph from exile. The agreement declared the annexation of Tibet by the PRC and made it part of Chinese territory.²³ He later repudiated his ratification on grounds of having been coerced into it. Other members of the government later also questioned the validity of the agreement as they had not signed it at all.²⁴ In 1956, clashes between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and guerilla resistance fighters in Kham and Amdo regions took place. These regions had been subjected to socialist reform.²⁵ Between 04/17/1958 and 04/25/1958, the so-called Xunhua Incident took place. In Xunhua, socialist reforms were underway and within this framework, religious leaders were sent away for "re-education". Over 4000 people revolted and killed the leader of the Chinese task force. In order to suppress the rebellion, the PLA massacred over 400 people on 04/25/1958.²⁶ The incident is believed by some to be the precursor for the 1959 Tibetan Uprising.²⁷ Beginning in 1957, the CIA trained Tibetan rebels in the United States to organize rebellions back in Tibet.²⁸

03/10/1959 End Part of Other Country [of China, Communist Ideocracy]/Start No Central Authority: On this date, the Tibetan Uprising broke out in Lhasa. In 1957, the Defenders of the Faith Volunteer Army had begun to assemble around Gompo Tashi Andrugtsang. This was a rebel army forming against the Chinese. By 1958, Gompos army had taken control of a portion of central Tibet.²⁹ On 03/10/1959, the Dalai Lama intended to attend a dance performance at the PRC headquarters. Rumors from an unknown source were spread that the Chinese intended to abduct the Dalai Lama during this performance. Thousands of Tibetans surrounded the palace of the Dalai Lama to prevent him from leaving. Violence first targeted senior Tibetan officials accused of conspiring with the Chinese and then later the Chinese officials. Protestors used anti-Chinese slogans in expression of their wish for China to leave Tibet for good. The Dalai Lama consulted the state oracle and decided to flee Lhasa. After a shell hit the palace on 03/17/1959, the Dalai Lama fled to India³⁰ with the help of the CIA.³¹

03/23/1959 End No Central Authority/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of China, Communist Ideocracy]: This date marked the end of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising.³² However, the Tibetan guerilla movement, Cushi

Gagdruk, continued until 1974, when the United States stopped supporting their cause.³³ During the next years, Tibet was hit by famine, leading to the death of thousands of Tibetans. The cause of the famine was contested. Whereas the Tenth Panchen Lama made the Chinese policies, such as the Great Leap Forward, responsible, officials in China claimed natural disasters as the cause. Furthermore, this period saw the destruction of the majority of Tibet's monasteries. In 1960, the ICJ published a report about Tibet, which accused China of violating the 1951 Seventeen Point Agreement, as well the suppression of Tibetan culture, genocide and severe Human Rights violations. On 09/01/1965, the region formerly governed by the Dalai Lama's administration from 1951 to 1959 (Ü-Tsang and western Kham) was rebranded as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).³⁴ On 09/01/1965, Tibet became the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), a provincial division of China.³⁵ The governance of Tibet by the Chinese government is carried out through the administration of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and 12 Tibetan autonomous prefectures or counties situated in the neighboring provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan. According to the Chinese constitution, autonomous regions possess the prerogative to develop their own regulations and enforce national laws in line with local circumstances. Nevertheless, in reality, decision-making power is centralized in the hands of appointed ethnic (Han) Chinese officials of the CCP, which maintains a monopoly over political authority.³⁶ The classification of this period as Direct Rule Colonial Regime is justified on four grounds. First, Han Chinese rule over Tibet is ethnically, culturally, linguistically and religiously distinct, the difference being greater than between many colonial powers and their territories elsewhere in the dataset. Second, the Tibetan population has no meaningful representation in the Chinese state, with ethnic Tibetan officials confined to lower-tier and token roles. Third, systematic Sinification through mass Han immigration, the destruction of Tibetan cultural institutions during the Cultural Revolution, and the suppression of Tibetan language and religion correspond to classical patterns of colonial transformation. Fourth, no international majority explicitly recognizes Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, as most states accept de facto Chinese control, but de facto control and recognized sovereignty are categorically distinct. The Tibet Autonomous Region's regional people's congress, officially elected by lower-level people's congresses, nominates representatives to China's 3,000-member National People's Congress (NPC) on a five-year cycle. However, in reality, all candidates undergo scrutiny by the CCP.³⁷ Engaging in any form of organized political activity beyond the CCP is deemed unlawful and met with severe penalties, as is any indication of allegiance to or contact with the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), a representative entity headquartered in Dharamsala, India, commonly acknowledged as a government-in-exile.³⁸ Political prospects for ethnic Tibetans within Tibet are notably restricted. Top-tier and critical positions within the CCP and government are predominantly held by ethnic Chinese officials, leaving ethnic Tibetans relegated to lower-tier and token roles. The authorities vehemently suppress and severely penalize any autonomous political or civic involvement by ethnic Tibetans, even regarding local community matters that were previously regarded as less politically contentious in past decades.³⁹ The nominal autonomy framework of the TAR does not constitute meaningful self-governance: the structural subordination of all Tibetan administrative institutions to CCP oversight, the absence of competitive political participation, and the systematic suppression of Tibetan cultural and political identity collectively place this case as a just-in case within the Direct Rule Colonial Regime category rather than any form of autonomous or semi-sovereign arrangement (Roche/Leibold/Hillman 2023). According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the territory not free, which we also place in the not free category. V-Dem does not provide data for Tibet.

Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of China, Communist Ideocracy] continued as of 07/01/2025.

Notes

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_expedition_to_Tibet_\(1720\)#::~:~:text=Expel%20the%20Dzungars%20to%20preserve,the%20Qing%20dynasty%20in%201912](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_expedition_to_Tibet_(1720)#::~:~:text=Expel%20the%20Dzungars%20to%20preserve,the%20Qing%20dynasty%20in%201912).

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibet_under_Qing_rule#Political_status

- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan_dual_system_of_government
- ⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashag>
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalai_Lama#Searching_for_the_reincarnation
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_expedition_to_Tibet
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_expedition_to_Tibet
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_of_Lhasa
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_expedition_to_Tibet
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_Between_Great_Britain_and_China_Respecting_Tibet
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13th_Dalai_Lama#Military_expeditions_in_Tibet
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibet_under_Qing_rule#Qing_in_Kham,_1904-1911
- ¹³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet#Qing_conquest_and_administrative_rule_\(1720%E2%80%931912\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet#Qing_conquest_and_administrative_rule_(1720%E2%80%931912))
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1911_Revolution
- ¹⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet#Qing_conquest_and_administrative_rule_\(1720%E2%80%931912\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet#Qing_conquest_and_administrative_rule_(1720%E2%80%931912))
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xinhai_Lhasa_turmoil
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1911_Revolution
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1911_Revolution
- ¹⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet#De_facto_independence_\(1912%E2%80%931951\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet#De_facto_independence_(1912%E2%80%931951))
- ²⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibet_\(1912%E2%80%931951\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibet_(1912%E2%80%931951))
- ²¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_\(1950%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_(1950%E2%80%93present))
- ²² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_\(1950%E2%80%93present\)#1950%E2%80%931955:_Traditional_systems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_(1950%E2%80%93present)#1950%E2%80%931955:_Traditional_systems)
- ²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventeen_Point_Agreement#Legacy
- ²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annexation_of_Tibet_by_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China
- ²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1959_Tibetan_uprising
- ²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xunhua_Incident
- ²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1959_Tibetan_uprising
- ²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1959_Tibetan_uprising#Aftermath
- ²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protests_and_uprisings_in_Tibet_since_1950#Early_resistance_1950-1958
- ³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1959_Tibetan_uprising
- ³¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_\(1950%E2%80%93present\)#1956%E2%80%931958:_Trials_and_incremental_reform](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_(1950%E2%80%93present)#1956%E2%80%931958:_Trials_and_incremental_reform)
- ³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1959_Tibetan_uprising
- ³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chushi_Gangdruk
- ³⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_\(1950%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_(1950%E2%80%93present))
- ³⁵ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomes_Gebiet_Tibet
- ³⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/tibet/freedom-world/2023>
- ³⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/tibet/freedom-world/2023>
- ³⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/tibet/freedom-world/2023>
- ³⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/tibet/freedom-world/2023>

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