



The Himalayan Region – Bhutan, Tibet, and Yunnan

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This essay focuses on the political, economic, and cultural history of three Himalayan regions – Bhutan, Tibet, and Yunnan. Bhutan is an independent kingdom, closely allied with India, whereas Tibet and Yunnan are parts of the Peoples’ Republic of China. I wrote these lectures for a Bushtracks expedition in the Himalayan region in March-April 2008 and for a Stanford Travel/Study program in Bhutan in October-November 2011.

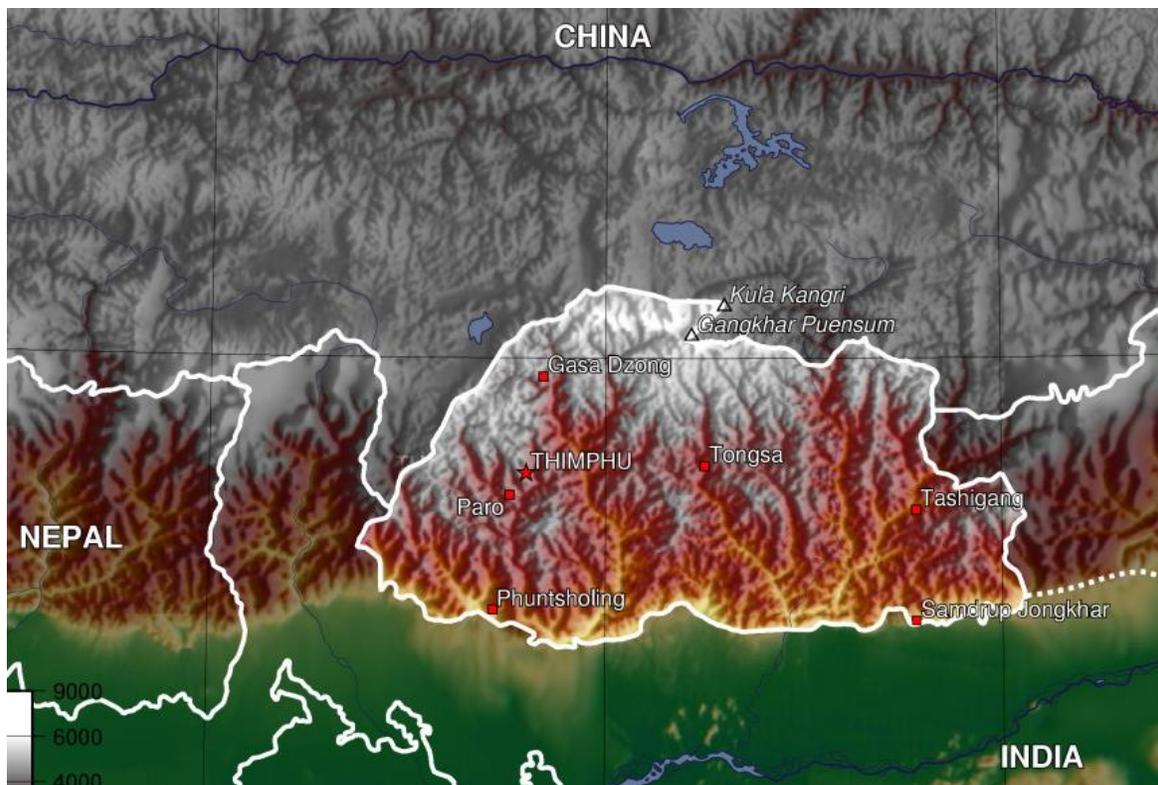
I first discuss the peopling of Bhutan, why the Guru Rimpoche (8th century) is revered today, and how the Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal unified Bhutan (17th century). I next examine how British imperialism influenced Bhutan’s monarchy (19th-20th centuries) and how Bhutan has evolved since the country emerged from isolation in 1950. I then look at Tibetan culture and agriculture, how the early Tibetan Empire (605-842) rose and fell, how Tibet fared under rule by the Dalai Lamas (16th-20th centuries), and how China’s Tibet policy has evolved since 1950.

Lastly, I analyze the differing strategies for Yunnan of the Han and Tang Chinese dynasties, the transformation of Yunnan under the Yuan and Ming dynasties, and how Qing and Republican leaders ruled Yunnan. I

append a time line, a bibliography, and a description of sites that I visited in the Himalayan region.

Bhutan (7th-18th centuries)

Geography and People. Bhutan, a Switzerland-sized nation, is located in the Himalayan Mountains between India and Tibet. Bhutan's staircase geography divides the country into three east-west zones, differentiated by altitude.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhutan_topo_en.jpg>

*Bhutan's Three Horizontal Geographic Zones –
South, Center, and North*

The south, rising from 100 meters on the Indian border to 1,500 meters, is subtropical with sal forests, and the predominantly Nepali farmers grow rice, fruits, and vegetables. The center (1,500 to 3,500 meters) is temperate with pine and deciduous forests. Most Bhutanese people, who are of Tibeto-Burman ethnicity, reside in this zone and produce rice, wheat, and potatoes in the river valleys.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhutan_agriculture.jpg>

Terraced Farmland – Near Paro, Central Bhutan

The north (3,500 to 7,500 meters) is alpine and has scrub forests or is treeless. The fifth of Bhutan that is permanently covered by snow or

glaciers is located in the northern zone. The few northern residents are Tibeto-Burman-speaking yak herders who graze the summer pastures in the Himalayas. Inner Himalayan Mountain ranges divide the small country into three north-south zones (the west, the center, and the east). Moreover, all of Bhutan's major rivers run from north to south and eventually enter the Brahmaputra River.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PhobjikhaYak.jpg>>*

*Yaks Grazing on Dwarf Bamboo –
Entrance of Phobjikha Valley, Northern Bhutan.*

The history of the settlement of Bhutan is not well documented. Archaeological evidence points to permanent habitation since about

2000 BCE. The country appears to have been settled gradually by Tibeto-Burman speakers from Tibet. During the past century and a half, Nepali people from India and Nepal have migrated into southern Bhutan. The most recent census (2005) counted 635,000 residents of Bhutan (of whom 553,000 were official Bhutanese citizens) and 19 major language groups. Dzongkha, a variation of Tibetan spoken mainly in the west, is the principal language of Bhutan. Dzongkha, Bumthang, Nepali, and English are the four official languages. In 2019, the World Bank estimated the population of Bhutan at 763,000, expanding at an annual rate of 1.3 percent.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Languages_of_Bhutan_with_labels.svg

The Languages of Bhutan – Dzongkha, Bumthang, Nepali, and English

Religion and Agriculture. Tantric Buddhism is believed (by those who practice it in Bhutan, Tibet, Mongolia, and Sikkim) to be the highest school of Buddhist thought. The original form of Buddhism, Theravada or Hinayana, stressed individual self-enlightenment through meditation to achieve the state of Nirvana (absence of rebirth). Mahayana Buddhism arose to emphasize service to others. Bodhisattvas, who had attained sufficient merit to enter Nirvana, chose instead to help others reach that desired state.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prayer_Flags,_Bhutan.jpg>*

Prayer Flags – Ubiquitous Symbols of Himalayan Buddhism in Bhutan

The Tantrayana form of Buddhism, which evolved from Mahayana in India between the 3rd and 7th centuries, was an anti-establishment protest that permitted the attainment of Nirvana within a single lifetime. To achieve that difficult goal, a Tantric Buddhist had to practice deep spirituality. The Tantra texts were translated into Tibetan, and the new religion spread through the Himalayan region by the 7th century.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhutan-prayer-wheel.jpg>>

*Himalayan Tantric Buddhism in Bhutan Incorporates Prayer Wheels –
For a Good Rebirth*

The Himalayan version of Tantric Buddhism differed from the original Indian form. The Tibetan-speaking peoples of the Himalayas, including the Bhutanese, practiced the Bon religion that featured the worship of natural spirits and shamanistic interventions. Himalayan Tantric Buddhism thus evolved as a syncretistic blend of standard Buddhism (theology, astrology, symbolism, mantras, and meditation) and Bon practices (spirit worship, natural myths, and terrifying deities).



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mahakala_Bernakchen.jpg>

Black-cloaked Mahakala – A Terrifying Bon Deity

Agriculture in Bhutan was organized on a feudal basis for millennia, and serfs paid taxes in kind (crops or butter) until the 1950s

when serf obligations ended. Now nearly all farmers in Bhutan own their own farms. The principal crops produced are rice, wheat, potatoes, and a variety of fruits and vegetables, and the main livestock reared are cattle, poultry, pigs, sheep, and yaks (at high elevations).



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BhutanRice1.jpg>>*

Rice Terraces in Central Bhutan

Guru Rinpoche and Instability (8th-16th centuries). Three prominent religious figures – a guru, a terton, and a shabdrung – dominated the first millennium of recorded Bhutanese history. Guru Rinpoche (who might be a composite or mythical figure and was also

known as Padmasambhava or “the lotus-born”) was born in the Swat Valley (in modern Pakistan). Many Bhutanese believe that the Guru transformed his consort into a tiger and flew miraculously on her back to Takstang Monastery (the “Tiger’s Nest”) near Paro in 747.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paro, Taksang Goemba \(Tiger%27s Nest\) \(15221622304\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paro,_Taksang_Goemba_(Tiger%27s_Nest)_%2815221622304%29.jpg)>*

*Taksang (The Tiger’s Nest), Paro Valley –
Where the Guru Rinpoche Meditated*

The Guru is credited with introducing the Nyingmapa school of Tantric Buddhism from Tibet into Bhutan. Devotees of that sect believe that he was a Second Buddha who hid his treasured writings (*termas*) for

later lamas (*tertons* or treasure revealers) to discover. Guru Rinpoche meditated in caves and subdued local Bon deities and shamans throughout Bhutan. Bhutanese Buddhists today worship the Guru in eight manifestations, and images of him are found in all temples in Bhutan. Most Bhutanese Buddhists believe that Guru Rinpoche had a vision in which he foresaw the later construction of a magnificent building in Punakha by someone named Namgyal.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paro_Padmasambhava.jpg>

*Guru Rinpoche, Worshipped as the Second Buddha in Bhutan –
Wall Painting on the Paro Bridge, Paro, Bhutan*

Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), the second key figure, was a Buddhist lama from Bumthang (in central Bhutan). He is Bhutan's most revered terton because of his important discoveries of termas left by the Guru. Pema Lingpa also built the Tamshing Lhakang monastery in Bumthang and composed numerous classical dances, depicting religious stories, which are still performed today. After the Guru's death in the 9th century, Bhutan entered a long period of instability in which local warlords fought civil wars. Nevertheless, during that time many Tibetans fled religious persecution in Tibet and migrated into Bhutan.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pema_Lingpa_image,_Tsakaling_temple.jpg

Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) – Terton of Bumthang

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and Unification (17th-18th centuries). In 1616, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal fled from Ralung, Tibet to western Bhutan and unified the country for the first time. The Shabdrung (whose title meant “at whose feet all submit”) was the leader of the Drukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. After a decade of political infighting, he went into exile in Bhutan at age 22.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shabdrung_rubin.png>

*Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) –
Unifier of Bhutan and Head of the Drukpa School*

The Shabdrung built an impressive series of *dzongs* (fortress/monasteries) across Bhutan, campaigned relentlessly against

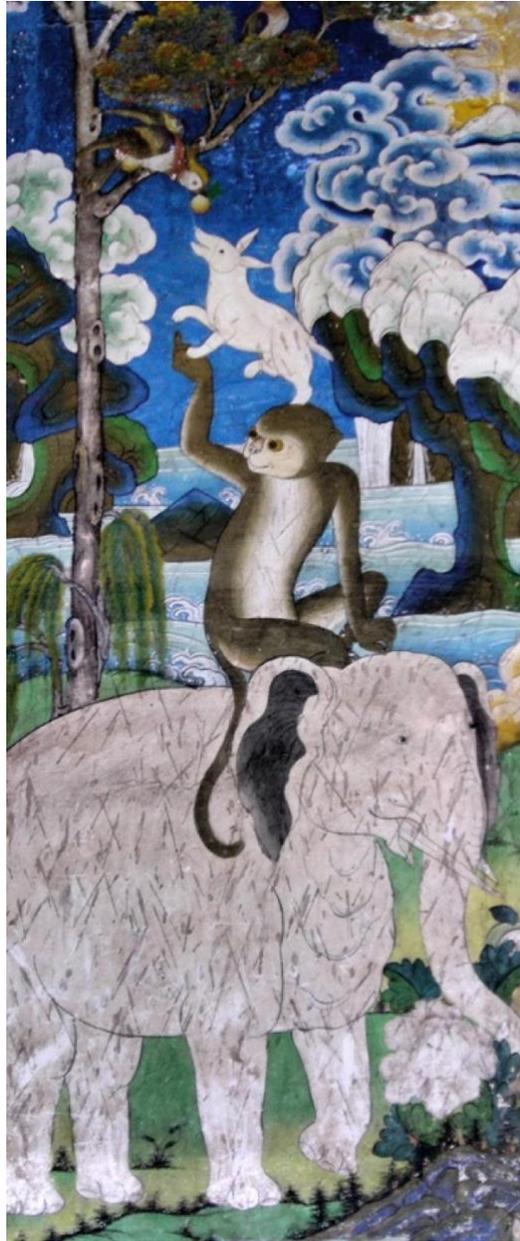
religious and secular competitors to unify Bhutan, and fought off five military invasions from his enemies in Tibet. He codified Bhutan's laws and established a central government with both secular (*desi*) and religious (*je khenpo*) leaders under his political and spiritual control. The Shabdrung created a tiered secular system of government with the head of state (*desi*) served by three governors (*penlops*) and numerous local leaders (*dzongpons*). In 1637, he fulfilled the Guru's prophecy and constructed a magnificent dzong in Punakha.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punakha_Dzong,_Bhutan_02.jpg>

*Punakha Dzong, Built by the Shabdrung –
Bhutan's Capital for Three Centuries*

When the Shabdrung died in 1651, Bhutan's leaders, fearing instability, concealed the news of his death until 1705. He was buried in the Machey Lhakhang, an inner temple in the Punakha dzong. His supporters completed the unification of Bhutan in 1656. But the Shabdrung's theocratic system of government could not function effectively without strong central leadership, and most of the reincarnations of the Shabdrung were weak leaders. Bhutan managed to fend off three more Tibetan invasions, the last in 1730, and retain its independence. Although the dual system of governance invited political infighting and instability during the 18th century, Bhutan enjoyed an outpouring of good Buddhist scholarship at that time.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FourHarmoniousAnimalsROI.jpg>>

*The Four Harmonious Animals: Elephant, Monkey, Hare, and Bird –
Buddhist Cooperation in Bhutan Yielded the Fruits of Life*

Bhutan (19th century-present)

British Influences and the Unification of Bhutan (1841-1907).

Bhutan experienced continuing political instability and diplomatic weakness in the 19th century. The rival regional governors (*penlops*) wrested power from the central government, became feudal lords, and engaged in power struggles that resulted in periodic civil wars. The plains between Bhutan's hills and the Brahmaputra River were known as the Duars (gates to Bhutan). Great Britain annexed the Assam Duars in 1841, triggering more than two decades of conflict with Bhutan.

Britain and Bhutan fought to a stand-off in 1864-1865. Under the Treaty of Sinchu La (1865), Britain annexed all of the Duars (2,750 square miles in the southern plains of Bhutan) to British India in return for an annual indemnity of Rupees 50,000 paid to Bhutan.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Raj.svg>

Bhutan (Light Brown) in the British Indian Empire, c. 1909

But then Bhutan changed. Jigme Namgyal, the penlop of Tongsa (central Bhutan) expanded his power by quashing feudal lords and besting his chief rival, the penlop of Paro (western Bhutan). Ugyen Wangchuck, Jigme Namgyal's son, succeeded his father as penlop of

Tongsa and Paro in 1882, defeated his main rival, the *dzongpon* of Thimpu, in 1885, and brought stability to the reunited country.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TrongsaDzong.jpg>>*

Tongsa Dzong – Home Base of Jigme Namgyal and Ugyen Wangchuck

In 1904, Ugyen Wangchuck aided the British in their invasion of Tibet by supplying troops, military access through Bhutan, and mediation. For that assistance, he was made Knight Commander of the British Empire in 1905 and gained strong British diplomatic support. In the absence of effective opposition and with British encouragement, Ugyen Wangchuck was elected King of Bhutan (Druk Gyalpo or Precious Ruler of the Dragon People) in 1907 by an assembly of secular

and religious leaders. The formation of a hereditary monarchy ended the Shabdrung's dual system of government.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ugyen_Wangchuck,_1905_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ugyen_Wangchuck,_1905_(cropped).jpg)>

*King Ugyen Wangchuck (1862-1926) –
The Founder of Bhutan's Hereditary Monarchy (r. 1907-1926)*

Bhutan's Five Kings (1907-present). Five kings have ruled in Bhutan's hereditary monarchy. Each was succeeded by his son. Ugyen Wangchuck (1907-1926), the founder and first king, conquered all of his rivals and instilled political stability in Bhutan, after more than two centuries of instability. But he chose to isolate Bhutan from foreign influences, and economic progress was very limited. Jigme Wangchuck

(1926-1952), the second king, was the consolidator of the monarchy who overcame a threat in the 1920s from the last reincarnation of the Shabdrung and his ambitious mother to ensure peace. But, like his father, Jigme Wangchuck preferred isolation for Bhutan, and despite his efforts to reform administration, he achieved only modest prosperity.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhutan-Jigme-Wangchuck.jpg>>

King Jigme Wangchuck (r. 1926-1952) – Consolidator of the Kingdom

Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1952-1972), the third king, was a modernizer who ended serfdom, redistributed land, and created a National Assembly. He sought international recognition, opened Bhutan

to foreign trade and aid, and invested in infrastructure. Bhutan began to make modest economic progress near the end of his reign.

Jigme Singye Wangchuck (1972-2006), the fourth king, was a far-sighted reformer who initiated economic development and transferred political power to an elected parliament. But he also had to deal with the problem of unrest by many of the ethnic Nepali residents of southern Bhutan who constitute about 35 percent of Bhutan's population.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jigme_Singye_Wangchuck_\(2008,_cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jigme_Singye_Wangchuck_(2008,_cropped).jpg)>

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck (r. 1972-2006) – Pictured in 2008

In 2006, the fourth king yielded power to his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, who was crowned as the fifth Druk Gyalpo in 2008. The new king initially focused on democracy and development in cooperation with the new Prime Minister, Jigmi Thinley, and his Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (Bhutan Peace and Prosperity) Party, which won 45 of the 47 parliamentary seats in the 2008 election. In the parliamentary election of 2018, the Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (Bhutan United) Party won 55 percent of the vote and 30 seats while the Druk Phuensum Tsongpa Party won 45 percent of the vote and 17 seats. Lotay Tshering, a doctor and the leader of the Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa Party, became Prime Minister in November 2018. But the fifth king retained most of the political power in Bhutan.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_Jigme_Khesar_Namgyal_Wangchuck.jpg>

*King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck (r. 2006-present) –
Pictured in 2007*

Economic Change in Bhutan (1952-present). When the third king took power in 1952, Bhutan was a feudal, isolated, remote country with very limited infrastructure and no roads or air links with other countries. The average per capita income was less than \$200, and most Bhutanese lived on much less since income distribution was skewed. When the fifth king was crowned and the first parliament elected in 2008, Bhutan's economy had been transformed. Income per capita

(measured by the World Bank at Purchasing Power Parity in constant 2017 dollars) grew at an average annual rate of 5.1% for the three decades between 1990 and 2019. By 2019, Bhutan's per capita income had increased to \$12,356. But that level was only 70 percent of the world average, and Bhutan ranked just 103rd of 186 countries in the World Bank's ranking of per capita incomes.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BhutanPackCrossing.jpg>>

Costly Transportation in Once Roadless Bhutan

Social indicators also showed marked improvement. In 2019, life expectancy was 71 years, the adult literacy rate was 67 percent, and 88

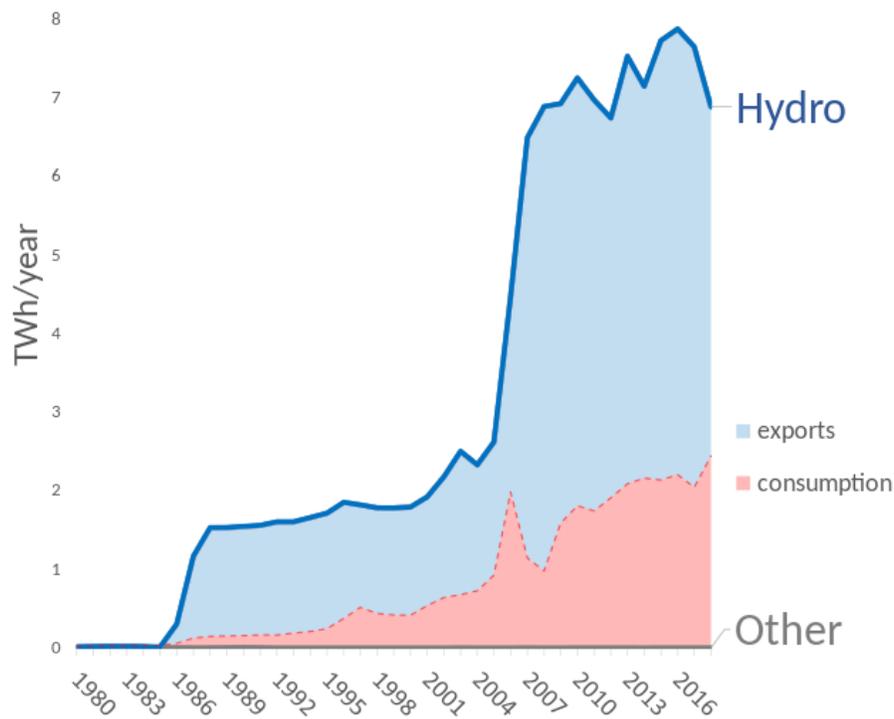
percent of children were completing primary school. Although four-fifths of Bhutan's people worked mainly in crop or animal agriculture, urban jobs were steadily increasing and there was no unemployment. Bhutan benefits from clean governance. In that same year, Bhutan ranked 129th of 189 countries in the United Nation's Human Development Index, a modest 89th of 190 countries in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index, and a very impressive 25th of 198 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhutanese_people.jpg>

Bhutan's Traditional Values – Compassion, Tolerance, and Wisdom

The principal source of growth in Bhutan since 1987 has been the production and export to India of hydro-electric power, all produced in run-of-the-river plants that do not threaten the environment. Four plants, all owned by the government company, Druk Green Power Corporation, produce 1,480 MW of electricity – only five percent of the estimated 30,000 MW of potential capacity. Hydro-electricity and electricity-based ferro-alloys account for 80 percent of Bhutan’s export earnings, over 40 percent of government revenue, and 20 percent of GNP.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhutan_electricity_production.svg

Production and Consumption of Electricity in Bhutan, 1985-2016

Bhutan faces large challenges to continue its rapid economic growth. The country needs to improve human capital (technical skills and adult literacy), raise rural incomes and agricultural productivity, slow the rate of urbanization until urban job opportunities increase, and continue to alleviate poverty (in 2017, only 8 percent of Bhutanese earned incomes less than the poverty line).



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at [https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh with the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Mr. Jigmi Y. Thinley after dedicating the 1020 MW Tala Hydroelectric Project, in Bhutan on May 17, 2008.jpg](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Prime_Minister,_Dr._Manmohan_Singh_with_the_Prime_Minister_of_Bhutan,_Mr._Jigmi_Y._Thinley_after_dedicating_the_1020_MW_Tala_Hydroelectric_Project,_in_Bhutan_on_May_17,_2008.jpg)

Bhutan's Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley (Left) and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh – Opening a Hydroelectric Project in 2008

Gross National Happiness (1979-present). In 1979, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck decreed that Bhutan would pursue Gross National Happiness (GNH), blending socioeconomic development with environmental preservation, promotion of traditional cultural values, and representative governance. Income per capita has grown at an annual rate of 5.1 percent in the past three decades, mainly based on exports of hydro-electricity to India, and the average life expectancy has improved to 71 years. However, Bhutan's population grew at an average annual rate of nearly 2 percent during that period (down to 1.3 percent in 2019), and Bhutan has been dependent on India for trade, investment, and foreign aid.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi with the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dr. Lotay Tshering, at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi on December 28, 2018.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Prime_Minister,_Shri_Narendra_Modi_with_the_Prime_Minister_of_Bhutan,_Dr._Lotay_Tshering,_at_Rashtrapati_Bhavan,_in_New_Delhi_on_December_28,_2018.jpg)

Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering (2018 –, Left) and India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi (2014 –) – New Delhi, India, 2018

Bhutan has increased its forest cover to 72 percent, and 51 percent of Bhutan's land is protected in national parks, reserves, or sanctuaries. For the future, Bhutanese environmentalists are concerned about the prospects of increased encroachment on protected lands and hydropower development that is not run-of-the-river. To preserve Bhutanese cultural values, the government has introduced strict building codes (to promote traditional architecture) and funded traditional arts.

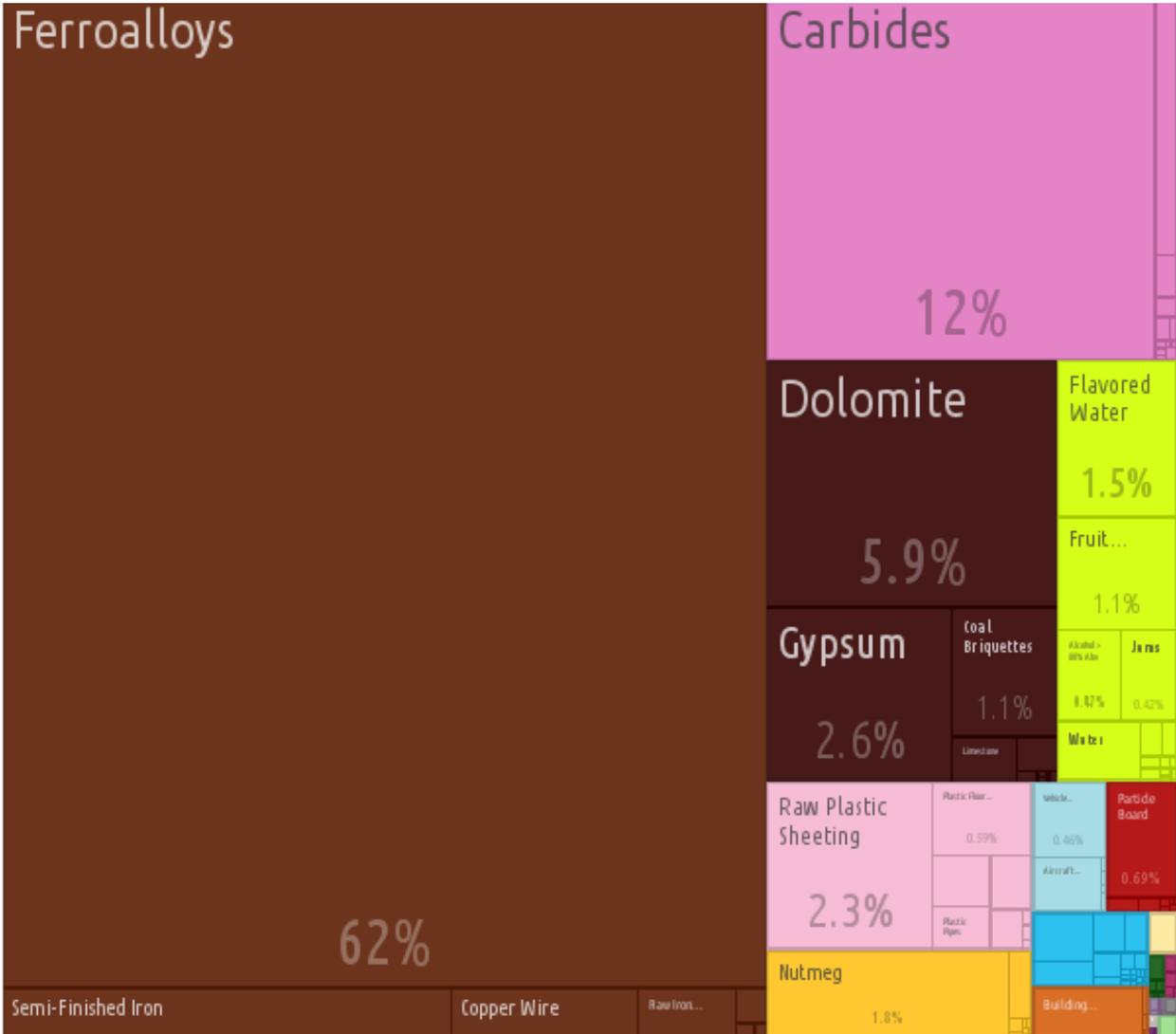


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rhododendron_arboreum_Thrashigyangtze.jpg>

Protected Rhododendron Forest – Spectacular in Bhutan’s Spring

Bhutan’s rulers remain concerned about the future of the remaining Nepali refugees in UN camps in Nepal (who had immigrated into Bhutan illegally) and of rapid urbanization undercutting traditional Bhutanese cultural values. The Fourth King decentralized administration to make decision-making more democratic, drafted a new constitution to bring the first elected government to Bhutan in 2008, and yielded power to his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, who was

crowned as the fifth Druk Gyalpo in 2008. But critics claim that democratization has been slow and restrained and that the traditional elite will continue to wield power in the new constitutional monarchy.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bhutan_Exports_Treemap_2017.svg

Proportional Representation of Bhutan’s Commodity Export Earnings (Excluding Earnings from Hydro-electric Energy) in 2017

Tibet (7th century-present)

Geography and People. The geography of Tibet is dominated by the Tibetan (Tibet-Qinghai) Plateau, the world's largest high-altitude region (1.2 million square miles). The median elevation of the Tibetan Plateau is 12,000 feet, and the plateau tilts with elevations in the north and west reaching 16,500 feet and those in the east and south falling to 10,000 feet. The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) occupies the western portion of the plateau, including the fertile central-south and the bleak Changtang region in the north. Ethnic Tibet, the areas settled by Tibetan people, consists of the TAR plus former Amdo and Kham, now part of the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Historic_Tibet_Map.png

Historic Tibet (Red-Lined Area) – Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibetan-speaking Areas of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces, China

There is evidence of continuous settlement of Tibet for at least 6,000 years. The ancient settlers were the ancestors of the Tibetan people, whose language is in the Tibeto-Burman family of the Sino-Tibetan group. Nearly all residents of the plateau were Tibetans until 1950, when Han Chinese began occupying Tibet. The Tibetan language, now with 30 consonants and 4 vowels, was first written in the 7th

century. The Tibetans adopted the ancient Brahmi script from North India and have used it for 1,300 years. Tibetan literature consists of a wide array of history, epics, autobiographies, and poems. The Tibetan classic, *The Epic of Gesar*, is the longest poem in world literature.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gesar_Gruschke.jpg>

Mural Depicting King Gesar of Ling – Hero of the Epic of Gesar

A Chinese census in 2014 counted 2.7 million residents of the TAR, but that figure excluded large numbers of non-resident Chinese, including perhaps 500,000 troops. The 2014 census tallied 6 million

Tibetans in Ethnic Tibet – TAR (2.7 million), Sichuan (1.5 million), Qinghai (1.4 million), Gansu (0.5 million), and Yunnan 0.15 million).



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:People_of_Tibet.jpg>

Tibetan People – At the Nagpu Horse Festival in 2008

Religion and Agriculture. Virtually all Tibetans devoutly practice Tantric Buddhism, although their religious beliefs are heavily influenced by the earlier Bon religion that was prevalent before Buddhism entered Tibet in the 7th century. Tibetan Buddhists believe that humans can escape from a predestined cycle of reincarnations by seeking the path to self-enlightenment (*nirvana*). Nirvana can be

achieved after this life if one earns sufficient merit. Already enlightened teachers (*lamas*) can assist that process.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
< <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hevajra-Tibetan.jpg> >

*Depiction of the Tantric Buddhist Figures, Hevaira and Nairatmva –
Tibetan Tapestry, 1700*

But the Tibetan world also is inhabited by cults of gods and demons (inherited from Bon spirit worship) that must be propitiated or exorcised. To earn merit and (one hopes) achieve enlightenment, a devout Tibetan Buddhist engages in meditation, pilgrimages to holy shrines, circumambulation and prostration at shrines, offering of butter-

lamps, recitation of scriptures (notably *Om Manipadmé Hum*), and donations to temples and monasteries. Monasteries receive family funds and sons, serve as centers of religious education and arts, and formerly trained Tibetan rulers.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_grand_view_of_Samye.jpg>

*Samye –
The First Gompa (Buddhist Monastery) Built in Tibet (775-779)*

Tibet's altitude and dry climate limit its agriculture. The principal crops are barley (roasted to make *tsampa*, the staple food), wheat, buckwheat, and peas, and some rice is grown in the southeast. Animal husbandry plays a critical role in Tibetan agriculture, and even today

about one-fourth of Tibetans in the TAR practice nomadic pastoralism. The main animals herded on Tibet's vast natural pastures are yaks, sheep, goats, horses, and mules. Feudal agricultural institutions existed until the late 1950s. Land was divided into hereditary estates, held by the monasteries (two-fifths), the state (two-fifths), and the nobility (one-fifth). Impoverished peasants paid their taxes in kind (crops, butter) through the estates.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yaks_still_provide_the_best_way_to_plow_fields_in_Tibet.jpg

Tibetan Farmer – Plowing His Field With Yak Animal Traction

Imperial and Medieval Tibet (7th-16th centuries). Tibet was first unified by Songtsen Gampo (c. 605-650). The new king introduced three innovations – writing, a law code, and Buddhism – to underpin governance in his vast empire.

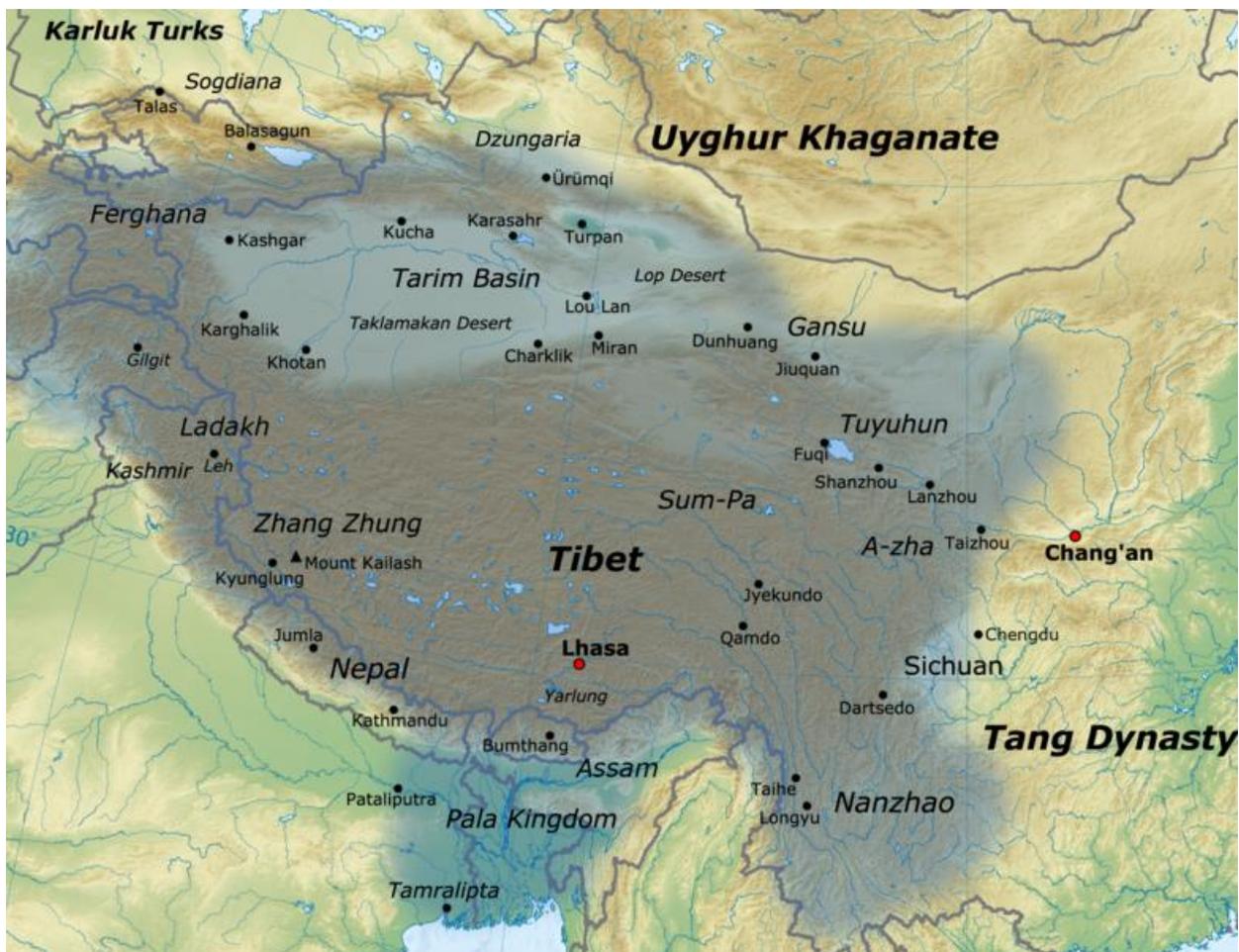


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_Songtsen_Gampo_\(Reigned_634-650\)_LACMA_M.80.229.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_Songtsen_Gampo_(Reigned_634-650)_LACMA_M.80.229.jpg)>

King Songtsen Gampo (605-650), Unifier of Tibet – Brass Sculpture, Central Tibet, 17th century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

The Tibetan Empire reached the apex of its territory and power under Trisong Detsen (755-797) whose armies, allied with the Nanzhao Kingdom (in modern Yunnan), plundered Tang China's capital,

Chang'an, for two decades and conquered key oases cities on the Silk Road (Khotan and Dunhuang). The Tibetan Empire collapsed in 842 because of the assassination of its anti-Buddhist king and fiscal insolvency (expenditures on monasteries had increased and revenues from booty had declined).



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tibetan_empire_greatest_extent_780s-790s_CE.png>

Greatest Extent of the Tibetan Empire (605-842) – Reached in 780s

Tibet then suffered political fragmentation as local principalities fought civil wars. But the Tibetan peoples retained their independence from late Tang and Song China while continuing regular trade arrangements. In 1207, the Mongol armies of Chinggis Khan forced Tibet to become a tributary state of Mongolia. Four decades later, the Mongol ruler, Godan, invited Tibet's leading lama, Sakya Pandita, to become his spiritual advisor in return for his protection of Tibet and its religion. So began the "patron-priest" relationship between Mongolia and Tibet. That link was intensified when Kublai Khan, the Mongol founder of the Chinese Yuan dynasty (1260-1294), invited Pakpa (Sakya Pandita's nephew) to be his preceptor, tutor, and nominal ruler of Tibet (in absentia from Peking).



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chogyal.JPG>>

*Pakpa (1235-1280), Tibetan Advisor to Kublai Khan –
Mongol-Sakya Rule*

With the collapse of the Mongol Yuan Empire, Tibet fragmented and antagonistic local rulers entered into two centuries of civil warfare and instability. But Tibet's political relationship with Ming China (1368-1644) was ceremonial and trade-based, not one of dependence.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ming-dynasty-map-small.jpg>>

Ming Dynasty of China (1368-1544) – Tibet Was Independent

Tibet under the Dalai Lamas (16th-20th centuries). Tibet's fragmented independence continued until the mid-17th century. In 1409, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), a leading lama, founded the Gelukpa ("Virtuous Ones" or Yellow Hat) order in the Ganden monastery, near Lhasa. Then in 1577, Altan Khan, a Tumed Mongol chieftain, formed a patron-priest alliance with Sonam Gyatso (1543-1588), the Gelukpa leader, and gave him the title, Dalai ("ocean"). The Mongol-Gelukpa,

patron-priest alliance deepened in the 1640s when Gushri Khan (1617-1682), a Khoshot Mongol leader, and the Great Fifth Dalai Lama reunified Tibet. With Mongol military protection, the Great Fifth established a monastic-based theocracy. The Dalai Lama became the religious and political leader and ruled from the elegant Potala Palace.



Source: *Wikimedia Commons*, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:5th_Dalai_Lama.jpg>

*Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, The Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) –
Established A Monastic Theocracy in Tibet*

The Manchu Qing dynasty of China defeated the Dzungar Mongols in 1720 and proclaimed a protectorate over Tibet that lasted until 1912. Qing emperors permitted the Dalai Lamas or their regents to

rule under the close supervision of Manchu advisors (*ambans*). As Qing power waned in the 19th century, Britain became interested in creating a buffer state in Tibet to protect British India from Russian expansionism. The British Younghusband Expedition invaded Tibet and captured Lhasa in 1904. Under the terms of the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904, Britain forced Tibet to recognize British control of Sikkim, open Tibet to British Indian trade, and pay a substantial indemnity.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FrancisYounghusband.jpg>>

Francis Younghusband – Leader of the British Invasion of Tibet, 1904

When the Qing dynasty fell in the Republican Revolution of 1912, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama declared Tibet's independence. But Britain

continued to recognize Chinese suzerainty over Tibet. Tibet's traditional elite refused to modernize in the 1920s, and Tibet was neutral in World War Two.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DalaiLama-13_lg.jpg>

Great Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso (1876-1933) – Declared Independence in 1912, Pictured c. 1910

Tibet and China (1950-present). China's Communist leaders claimed that Tibet was part of China and invaded in 1950 to reassert control. The United States and Great Britain refused to support Tibet's independence. Mao Zedong then instituted a policy of gradualist "peaceful liberation." In return for recognizing China's sovereignty,

Tibet retained its feudal theocracy under the leadership of the young Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PLA_marching_into_Lhasa.jpg>

*The People's Liberation Army Entered Lhasa in October 1951 –
To Begin "Peaceful Liberation"*

The gradualist policy changed in 1959, after 50,000 ethnic Tibetan refugees, fleeing collectivization in neighboring Chinese provinces, led massive protests. Mao then introduced firm Communist control – destroying Buddhist monasteries and temples, collectivizing feudal estates, and installing rule by the Chinese Communist Party. The Dalai

Lama and 80,000 supporters went into exile, mostly in Dharamsala, India, and sought international support for Tibetan rights.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Potala_palace21.jpg>

*The Potala Palace, Lhasa –
Winter Palace of the Dalai Lamas, 1649-1969*

Deng Xiaoping reversed policy direction in 1978 and introduced an emphasis on “economic integration” of Tibet with China, which continued for four decades. In hopes of winning Tibetan loyalty, Deng permitted a Buddhist revival and promoted economic development through investments in infrastructure. Although Deng hoped to persuade the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet, he instead has pushed for

Tibetan autonomy within China through effective international diplomacy. For his efforts, the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

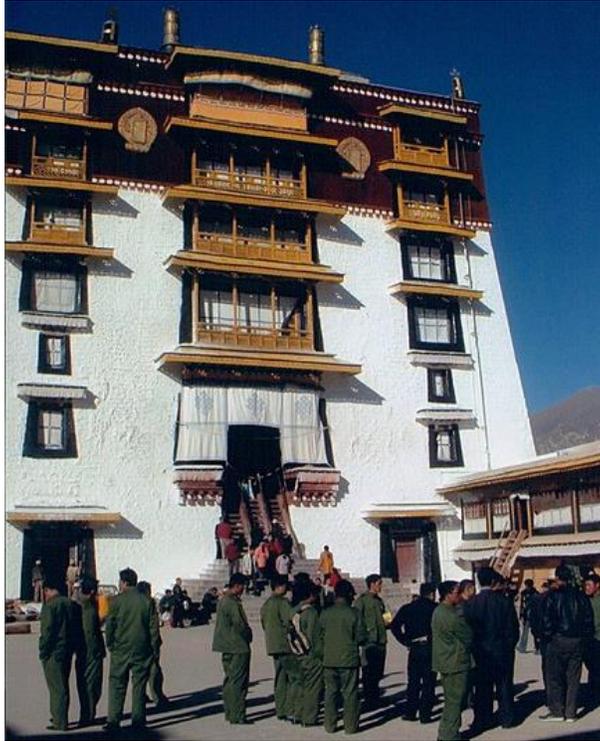


*Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dalai_Lama_1997.jpg>*

*Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (1935 –) –
Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1989). Pictured in 1997*

But the Dalai Lama has not succeeded in finding a resolution to the Tibet Question. China insists that Tibet has been a part of China for eight centuries and that China needed to destroy cruel Tibetan feudalism, whereas the Tibetans-in-exile assert that Tibetans have fundamental

human rights to cultural freedom and self-determination. The impasse persists.

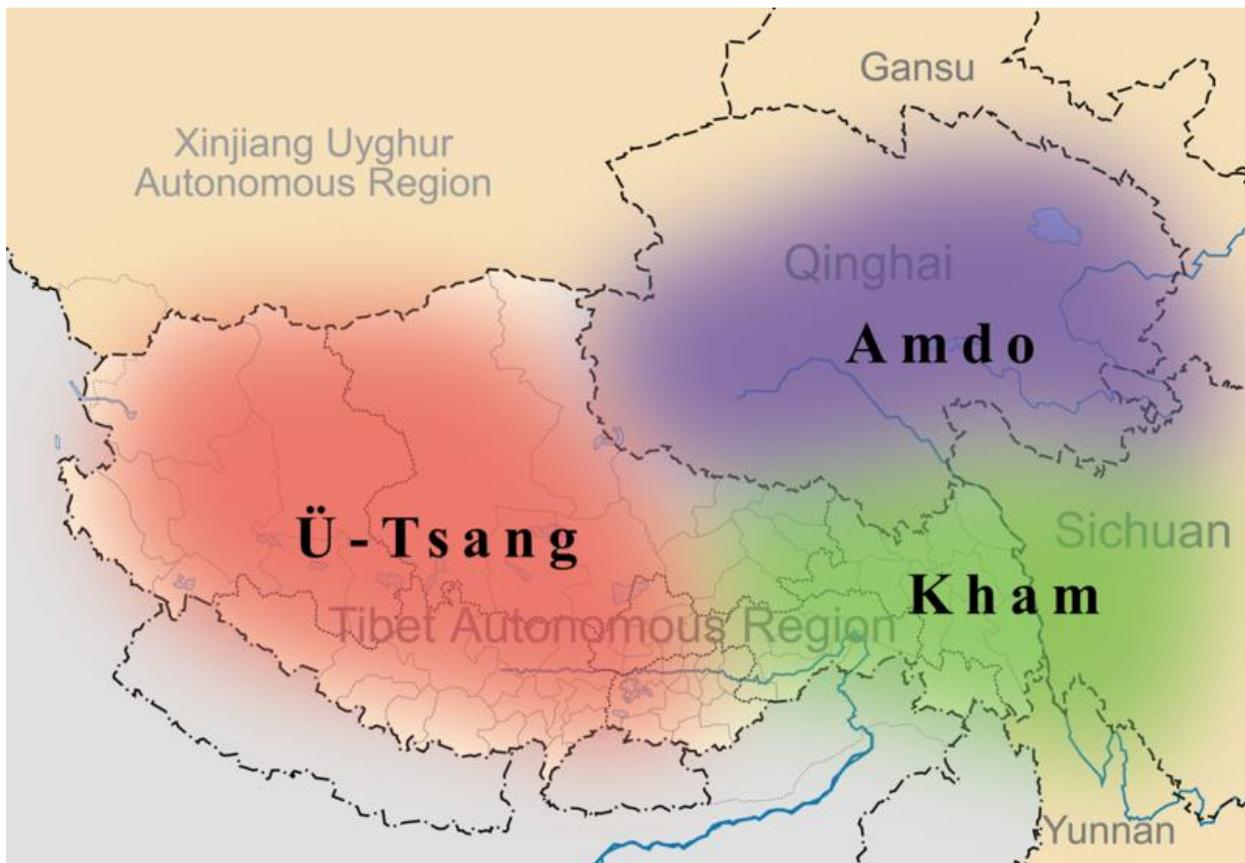


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_soldiers_on_the_roof_of_the_Potala,_Lhasa,_Tibet.jpg>

*China Continues To Repress Tibetan Self-determination –
Chinese Soldiers on the Roof of the Potala Palace, Lhasa, 2009*

Meanwhile, China has been investing heavily in Tibet and encouraging Han Chinese to move into the TAR. Between 1990 and 2019, per capita income in China (measured by the World Bank at Purchasing Power Parity in constant 2017 dollars) grew at an average annual rate of 8.7 percent, the fastest sustained income expansion in

world history. The price-adjusted per capita income in China in 2019 was \$16,787, and in the Tibet Autonomous Region it was \$11,579 – 69 percent of the average in China, 65 percent of the world average, and only 18 percent of the US level. The TAR was one of the poorest provinces in China in 2019, ranking 23rd of 31 Chinese regions in per capita income.

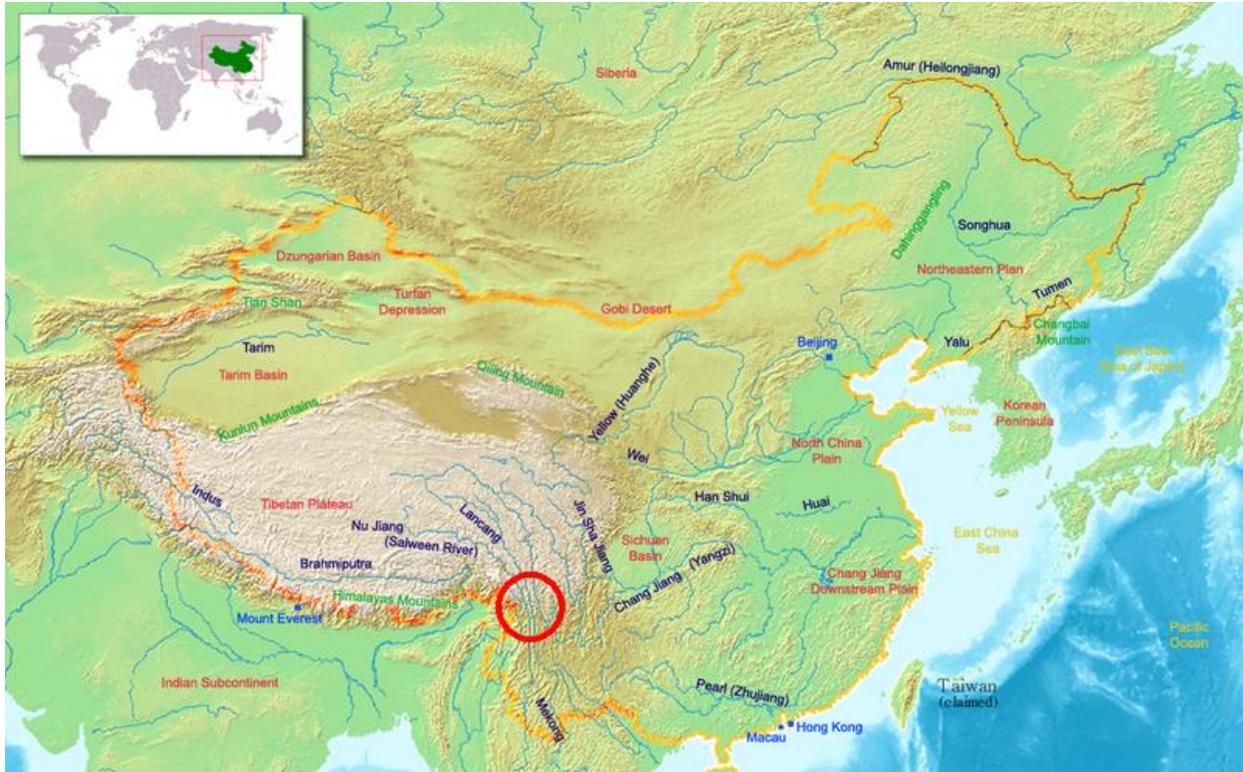


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tibet_provinces.png>

*The Traditional Provinces of Tibet (U-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham) –
Overlaid on the Provincial Boundaries of People's Republic of China*

Yunnan (4th century BCE-present)

Geography and People. Inner China covers the eastern and southern portions of the contemporary land mass identified as China. Inner China contains most of the country's arable land, much of it in the extensive river valleys that drain into the Pacific Ocean. The geography of Inner China is further divided at roughly the Yangtze River into north China, a temperate zone with a strong seasonal pattern and modest rainfall, and south China, a semi-tropical region with warmer temperatures and high rainfall. Yunnan Province in southwestern China is dominated by the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, which tilts from 7,000 feet elevation in the west to 4,000 feet in the east. Several of Asia's principal rivers – the Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze – flow through deep mountainous gorges in western Yunnan.

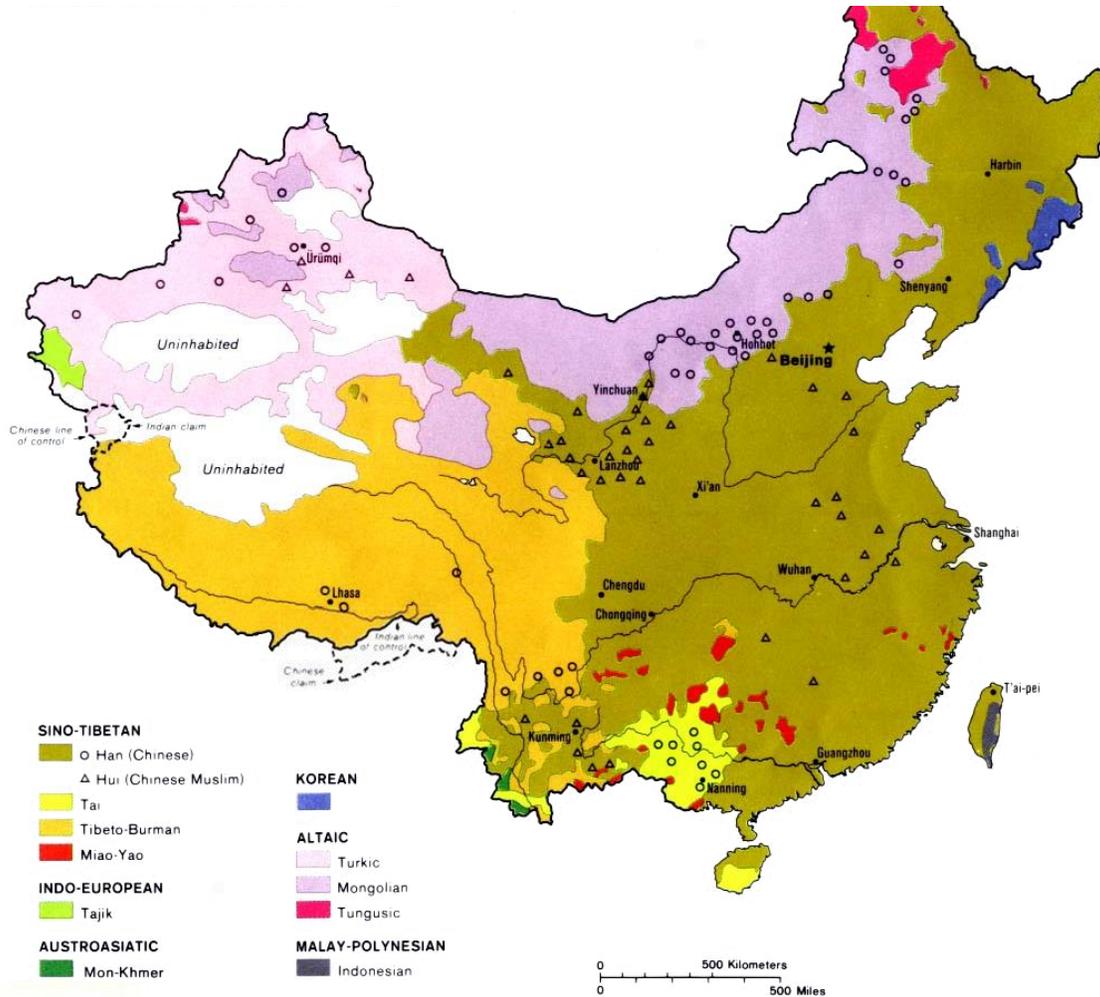


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Three_Parallel_Rivers_of_Yunnan_Protected_Areas_map01.png>

Four of Asia's Principal Rivers (Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze) Flow Through Western Yunnan.

China houses 1.4 billion people, nearly one-fifth of the world's total. About two-thirds of China's population live in south China (the southern half of Inner China), and only one-twentieth inhabit Outer China. Ninety-four percent of China's people belong to the Han Chinese ethnic group who live mainly in Inner China. The settlement of

China has been a dynamic process of Han Chinese conquest and expansion southward during the past two millennia.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethnolinguistic_map_of_China_1983.png

Ethno-linguistic Groups in China, 1983

The remaining 6 percent of China's population consists of a diverse range of ethnicities – Manchus in Manchuria, Mongols in Mongolia, Tibetans in Tibet, and numerous others in south China.

Today, two-thirds of Yunnan's 48.3 million people are Han Chinese and the remainder consist of 25 separate ethnic minorities. The 4.5 million Yi, who live in northern Yunnan, the 2 million Bai (northwest), and the 1.5 million Dai (south) are among the largest minority groups. The 330,000 Naxi and the 140,000 Tibetans inhabit northwestern Yunnan.

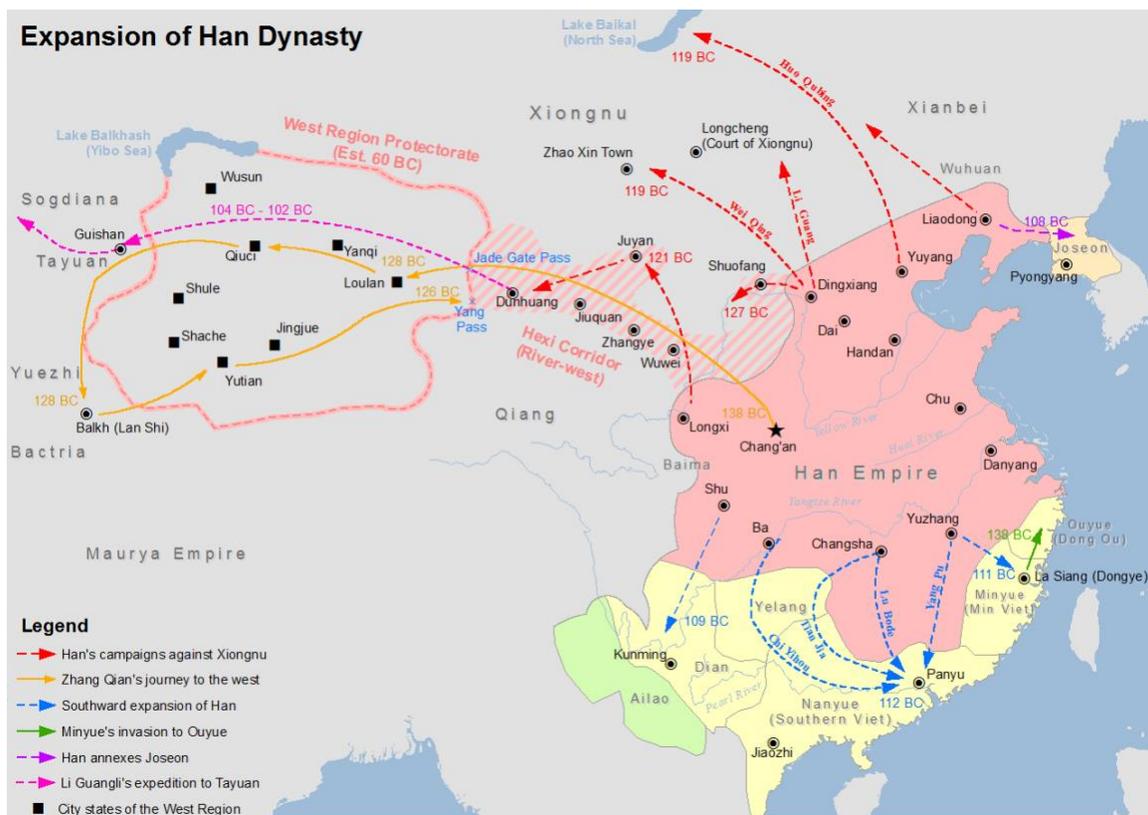


Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yi_woman_in_traditional_dressing.jpg>

Yi Woman in Traditional Dress, Northern Yunnan Province

The Dian and Nanzhao Kingdoms and Han and Tang China (4th century BCE-10th century). Han China (206 BCE-220 CE) was the longest-ruling dynasty in 21 centuries of Chinese imperial history.

Han rulers based their power on taxes from peasant agriculture and foreign trade and on tribute from conquered areas (mainly south of the Yangtze River). In the last two centuries of Han rule, 10 million Han Chinese migrated to regions south of the Yangtze to settle richer agricultural land. In Yunnan, Han emperors sought to control the trade route to India and to conquer for tribute.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Han_Expansion.png

Han Chinese Expansion (206 BCE-220 CE) – West into Outer China, South within Inner China (including Yunnan)

At least 2,700 years ago, an ancient rice- and bronze-based culture occupied Dian (in Yunnan). The small principalities were unified into the Dian Kingdom in 339 BCE by Zhuang Qiao, an invading Chinese general who chose to stay and lead. Han Emperor Wudi conquered Dian in 109 BCE, forced its rulers to pay regular tribute to China, and organized the Yunnan-Burma-India trade route. The Dian Kingdom collapsed along with the Han dynasty in the early 3rd century CE.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CMOC_Treasures_of_Ancient_China_exhibit_-_bronze_cowrie_container.jpg

Dian Bronze, Drum-shaped Vessel for Cowrie Shells – Valuable Oxen Are Protected from Predatory Tigers, Yunnan Province, c. 200 BCE

During the first of the three centuries of Tang rule (618-907), China reached the apex of its dynastic power. Tang wealth derived from taxing peasant agriculture, conquering tributary regions (especially to the west), and taxing foreign trade. By the mid-8th century, Tang power was receding because of peasant rebellions and wars with the Uighur Empire and the Kingdom of Nanzhao.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tang_Dynasty_circa_700_CE.png>

*Tang Chinese Empire (618-907), c. 700 –
Kingdom of Nanzhao (734-902) Retained Its Independence*

Nanzhao (734-902) occupied much of southwest China and parts of southeast Asia. Yi kings ruled from their capital at Dali (in northwestern Yunnan) over Bai subjects in a stratified society based on rice and trade. Nanzhao allied with Tibet in 752 and 763 to defeat Tang armies. The kingdom collapsed in 902 after its chief minister murdered the royal family.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kunming_Oct_2007_007.jpg>

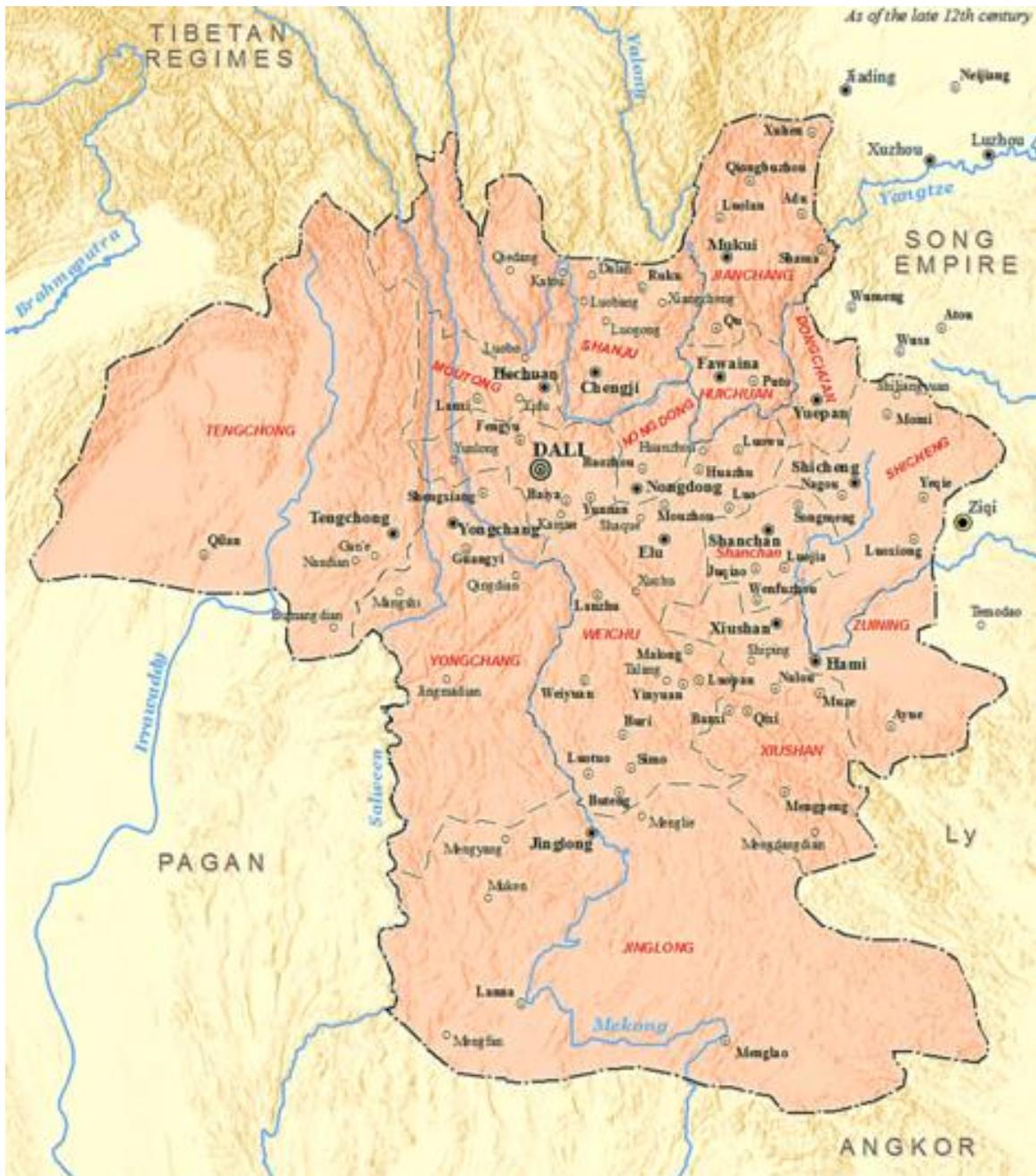
*Gilt Figure of Guanyin, Primary Mahayana Buddhist Bodhisattva –
Discovered in the Qianxun Pagoda, Dali, Nanzhao Kingdom, 9th century*

The Dali Kingdom and Yuan and Ming China (10th-17th centuries). The Kingdom of Dali was founded in 937 by Bai aristocrats. Dali was a reconstruction of Nanzhao. It duplicated its predecessor's capital city (Dali), sources of wealth (rice agriculture and foreign trade), stratified society (rulers, ministers, priests, artisans, and commoners), and independence (from China).



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Terrace_field_yunnan_china_denoised.jpg>

*Honghe Hani Rice Terraces In Yunnan –
Rice Provided Wealth for the Nanzhao and Dali Kingdoms*



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dali_Kingdom.png

The Dali Kingdom (937-1253) – At Its Peak in the mid-12th century

Kublai Khan and his Mongol army conquered Dali in 1253 as part of his campaign to crush the Chinese Song dynasty and reunify China

under Mongol rule. The Mongols ruled China as the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). They generated wealth from agriculture, Silk Road trade (which peaked under Mongol rule), and Eurasian conquest. Yuan China ruled Yunnan directly, after its destructive conquest of Dali (described in *The Travels of Marco Polo*). The Mongols sponsored 50,000 soldier-settlers in Yunnan, including many Muslims.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
< https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yuen_Dynasty_1294_-_Goryeo_as_vassal.png >

*Yuan Empire of Kublai Khan and Heirs (1271-1368) –
Territorial Extent in 1294 (including Yunnan)*

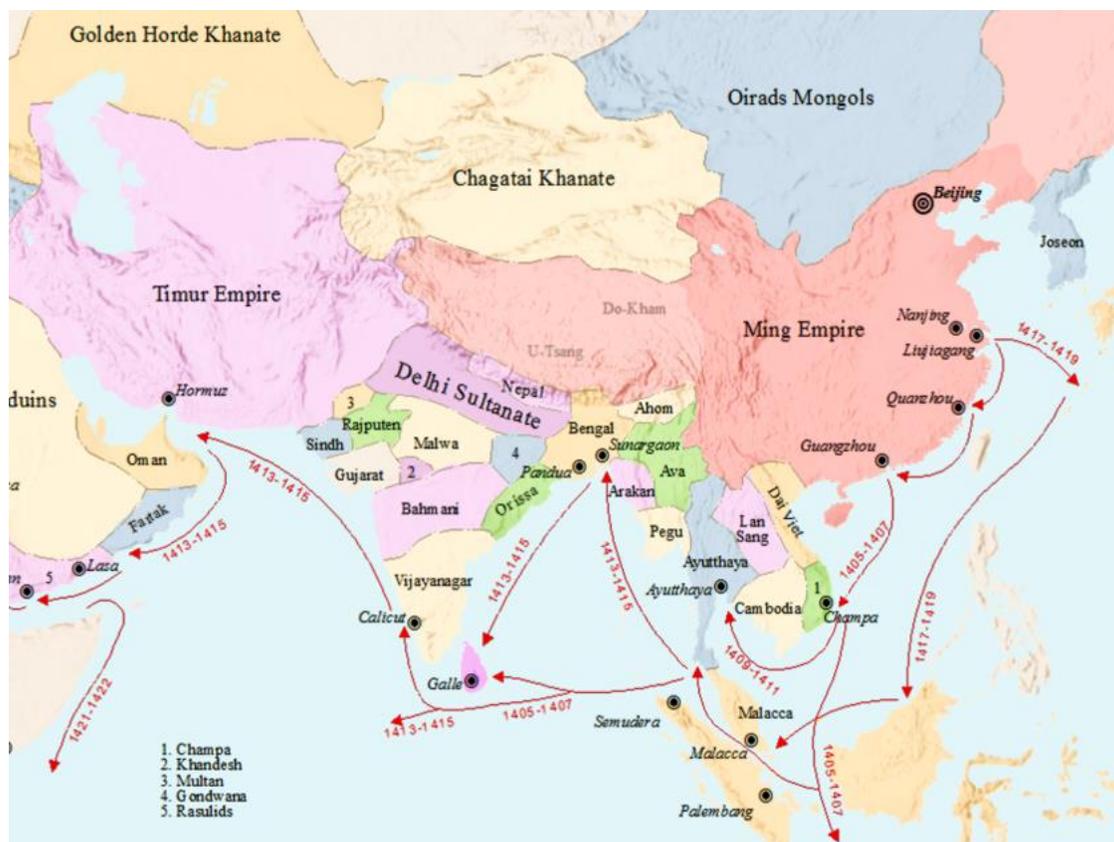
The Han Chinese regained control of China in 1368 when a peasant-rebel overthrew the Mongols and established the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Fearing a resurgence of Mongol power, most Ming rulers were isolationist. They banned foreign trade and attempted little foreign conquest. But political stability and productive agriculture permitted China's population to double (to 160 million) under Ming rule.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ming_dynasty-map-small.jpg>

Ming Dynasty of China (1368-1544) – Feared Mongol Re-invasion and Turned Inward, Ruled Indirectly in Yunnan

The Mings ruled Yunnan indirectly, but they settled 200,000 Han Chinese soldiers in Yunnan. Yunnan under Yuan and Ming rule (1253-1644) thus was in transition. The Ming settlement policy created a Han Chinese majority. A Muslim eunuch and admiral from Yunnan, Zheng He, became the Ming's greatest explorer by leading seven maritime expeditions, one with 27,000 men on 317 ships, to 30 states in south Asia and eastern Africa between 1405 and 1433.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Voyages_of_Zheng_He.png

Zheng He's Exploratory Voyages, 1405-1433

Yunnan Warlords and Qing and Republican China (17th-20th centuries). The Manchus conquered China in 1644 and ruled as the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). The new dynasty had its golden age (1662-1795) under the first three Manchu emperors (Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong). Qing conquest added Taiwan (1683), Mongolia (1697), Tibet (1720), and Turkestan (Xinziang, 1757) to China. In the 19th century, corruption, foreign incursions, and peasant rebellions brought fiscal insolvency. Qing rule ended with the Republican Revolution of 1911-1912.

Yunnan remained part of China under Qing rule, but competing feudal warlords had effective control. Hui Chinese Muslims rebelled in 1855, declared independence under a Sultan of Dali, and ruled Yunnan until they were brutally suppressed in 1873. Britain and France intrigued in Yunnan in the late 19th century, but chose to leave it as a buffer region between British Burma and French Indochina.

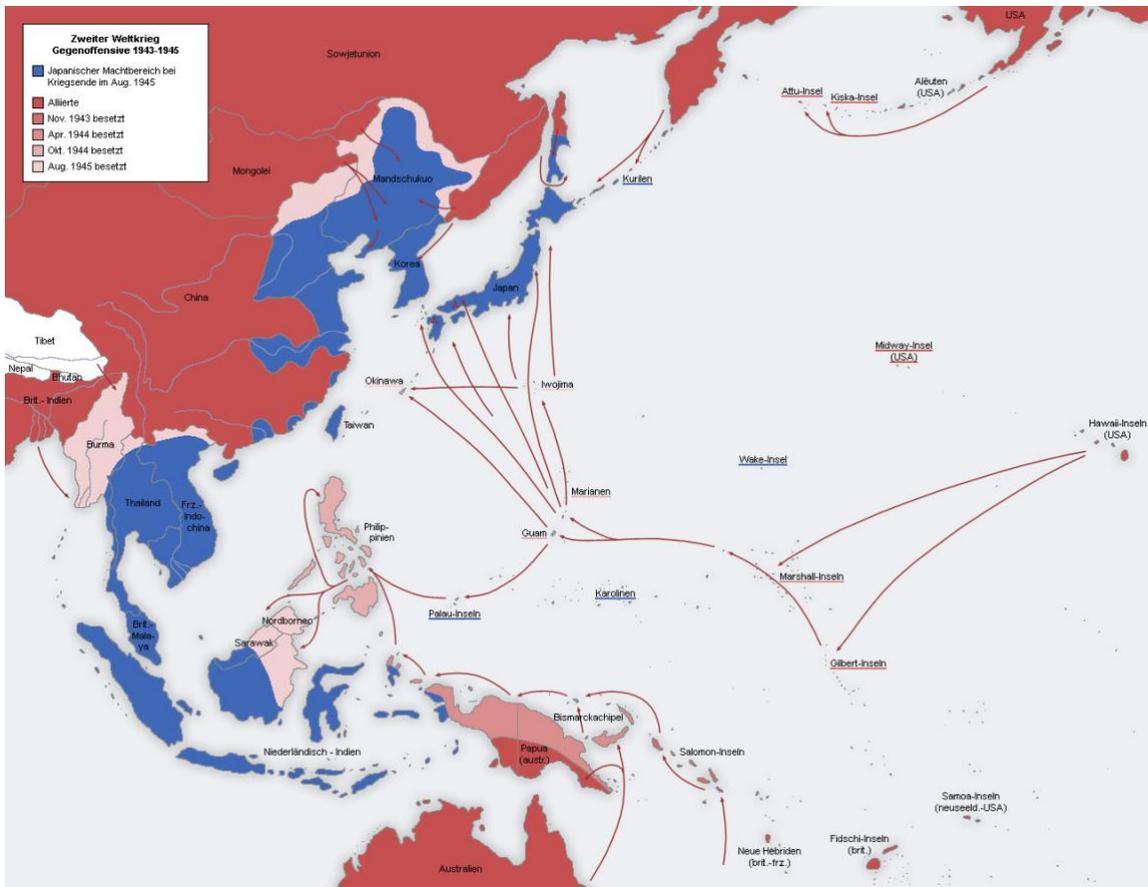


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at

< https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qing_Dynasty_1820.png >

Qing China, 1644-1911 – Exercised Only Symbolic Rule in Yunnan

Local warlords ruled in much of war-torn Republican China (1912-1949). The civil war (Nationalists versus Communists) and the Japanese invasion (1937-1945) created widespread instability. Yunnan, ruled by local warlords in the Republican era, became a strategic supply depot during World War II. The Burma Road and the Flying Tigers linked China with India after Japan closed all eastern Chinese supply routes.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Second_world_war_asia_1943-1945_map_de.png

*Allied Counter-offensive Against Japan, 1943-1945 –
 Aided Greatly in China by the Burma Road to Yunnan*

Yunnan in the People’s Republic of China (1949-present).

Communist victory in 1949 brought stability, brutality during Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and rapid economic progress after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms (1978). Yunnan’s ethnic minorities were persecuted under the Cultural Revolution but later given autonomy.

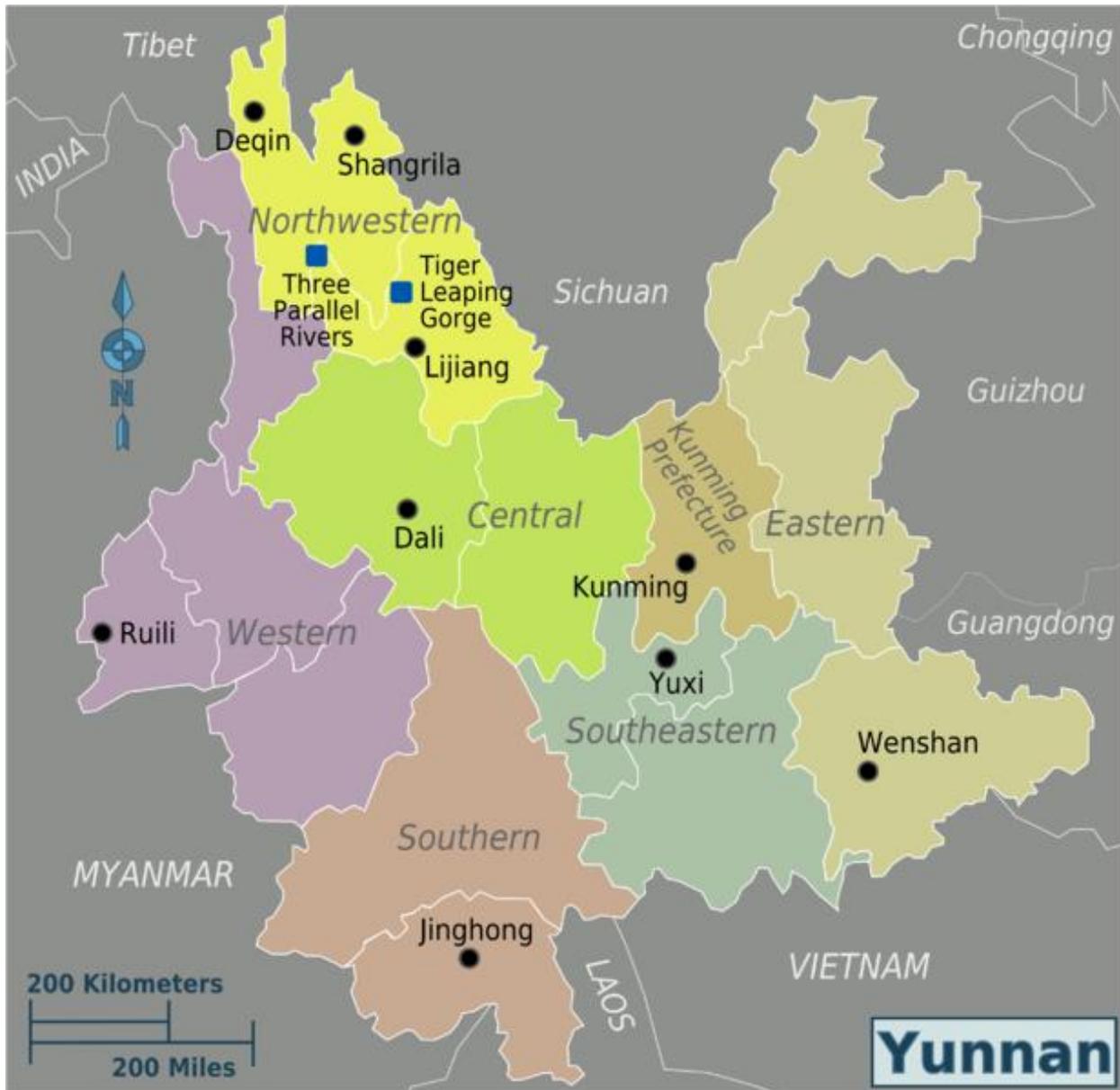


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cultural_Revolution_poster.jpg>

*Propaganda Poster From the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976 –
“The Chinese People’s Liberation Army Is The Great School of Mao
Zedong Thought,” 1969*

Between 1990 and 2019, per capita income in China (measured by the World Bank at Purchasing Power Parity in constant 2017 dollars) grew at an average annual rate of 8.7 percent, the fastest sustained income expansion in world history. The price-adjusted per capita income in China in 2019 was \$16,787, and in Yunnan Province it was \$11,353 – 68 percent of the average in China, 64 percent of the world

average, and only 17 percent of the US level. Yunnan was one of the poorest provinces in China in 2019, ranking 24th of 31 Chinese regions in per capita income – one level behind Tibet.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yunnan_\(en\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yunnan_(en).png)

Contemporary Yunnan Province, China

Time Line for the Himalayan Region – Bhutan and China (Tibet and Yunnan)

700 BCE	Dian (Yunnan) region occupied by an ancient rice- and bronze-based culture
339 BCE	Dian Kingdom formed – led by Zhuang Qiao, an invading Chinese general – lasted until early 3 rd century CE
206 BCE-220 CE	Han Empire in China – longest-ruling dynasty in Chinese history – comparable to Roman Empire in population, size, wealth
141-87 BCE	Emperor Wudi ruled – peak of Han power – used Confucianist scholar-officials to run bureaucracy – promoted free peasantry
133-101 BCE	Wudi expanded westward – took Gansu Corridor – claimed suzerainty over Tibet, Turkestan, Central Asia – opened Silk Road
111-108 BCE	Wudi conquered Kingdom of Yue (south China, north Vietnam), Dian Kingdom (southwest China), Manchuria, Korea – opened conquests to Chinese trade, tribute
3 rd 7 th centuries	Tantrayana form of Buddhism evolved from Mahayana Buddhism in India – attainment of Nirvana within a single lifetime – new religion spread through Himalayan region
605-650	King Songsten Gampo ruled Tibet – first unified Tibet – introduced writing, a law code, Buddhism – governed a vast empire.

618-907	Tang Empire in China – innovations in agriculture, revival of trade on Silk Road, conquests in China and central Asia – failed to conquer Kingdom of Nanzhao
663	Tibet defeated China – persistent threat in west for next 150 years
8 th -9 th centuries	Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) is believed to have lived – credited with introducing the Nyingmapa school of Tantric Buddhism from Tibet into Bhutan
747	Guru Rinpoche is believed by many Bhutanese to have transformed his consort into a tiger and flown on her back to Takstang Monastery, near Paro
752 and 763	Tibet and Nanzhao (Yunnan) defeated Tang army – border allies
754-902	Kingdom of Nanzhao – most of southwest China and parts of southeast Asia – capital at Dali – Yi kings ruled over Bai subjects --- wealth from rice and trade
755-797	King Trisong Detsen ruled Tibet – apex of Tibetan imperial power – Tibetan armies, allied with Nanzhao Kingdom, plundered Tang China’s capital, Chang’an, for 20 years
763-783	annual Tibetan raids – plundered Chang’an, Tang capital

- 842 Tibetan Empire collapsed – assassination of an anti-Buddhist king – fiscal insolvency (expenditures on monasteries had increased and revenues from booty had declined)
- 937-1253 Kingdom of Dali – formed by Bai aristocrats – replicated Nanzhao – same capital (Dali), sources of wealth (rice agriculture, foreign trade), stratified society (rulers, priests, commoners)
- 960-1279 Song Dynasty in China – Chinese-led – population doubled – Yangzi Valley economic heart – printing, gunpowder, magnetic compass
- 1204-1227 Genghis Khan ruled Mongolia, north China – Mongol horse warriors – governed and taxed rather raided and extorted
- 1207 Genghis Khan’s Mongol armies forced Tibet to become a tributary state of Mongolia
- 1253 Kublai Khan and his Mongol army conquered Dali – campaign to encircle and absorb the Chinese Song dynasty – Mongols sponsored 50,000 soldier-settlers in Yunnan
- 1260-1294 Kublai Khan – first alien ruler of all China – extended Grand Canal to Beijing – invited Pakpa to be his advisor and ruler of Tibet
- 1271-1368 Yuan Dynasty – Mongol-led – ruled all of China – effective under Kublai Khan – corrupt, ineffective under his successors

- 1279 Kublai Khan defeated Song Dynasty – re-unified China
- 1368-1644 Ming Dynasty in China – reunified China under Chinese leadership – Tibet was independent – Yunnan ruled by warlords – 200,000 Chinese soldiers settled in Yunnan
- 1405-1433 Zheng He, Ming admiral and Muslim from Yunnan – led seven maritime expeditions, one with 27,000 men on 317 ships, to 30 states in south Asia and eastern Africa
- 1409 Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), a leading lama, founded the Gelukpa (“Virtuous Ones” or Yellow Hat) order in the Ganden monastery, near Lhasa, Tibet
- 1450-1521 lifetime of Pema Lingpa, a Buddhist lama from Bumthang (central Bhutan) – discovered writings by Guru Rinpoche – built Tamshing Lhakang monastery
- 1577 Altan Khan, a Tumed Mongol chieftain, formed a patron-priest alliance with Sonam Gyatso (1543-1588), the Gelukpa leader – gave him the title, Dalai (“ocean”)
- 1594-1651 lifetime of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, leader of Drukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism – repelled 5 invasions from Tibetan armies –built dzongs (fortresses) – unified Bhutan
- 1600-1947 Great Britain’s involvement in India – trade evolved into colonialism

- 1600-1858 English East India Company (EEIC) – royal chartered company – commerce, tax plundering, conquistador imperialism
- 1617-1682 Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, The Great Fifth Dalai Lama – established a monastic theocracy with Mongol military protection – Dalai Lama was religious/political leader
- 1637 Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal fulfilled prophecy of Guru Rinpoche – constructed a magnificent dzong (fortress/monastery) in Punakha
- 1644-1912 Qing Dynasty in China – Manchurian-led – population tripled – conquests expanded China to current size – Tibet, Yunnan ruled as part of China – Qing weak in 19th century
- 1662-1795 Qing Golden Age – under the first three Manchu emperors (Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong)
- 1697-1757 Qing foreign conquest – expanded to China’s current borders – Mongolia (1697), Tibet (1720), Turkestan (Xinziang, 1757)
- 1841 Great Britain annexed the Assam Duars – the plains between Bhutan’s hills and the Brahmaputra River
- 1855-1873 Hui Chinese Muslims rebelled and declared independence under a Sultan of Dali – ruled Yunnan until 1873 when they were brutally suppressed

1857-1858	Sepoy Revolt – half of EEIC army revolted against British rule – Britain regained control
1858	Government of India Act of 1858 – British Parliament abolished EEIC, imposed British crown rule, reformed Indian military
1858-1947	British crown rule in India – tight economic and political control
1862-1926	lifetime of Ugyen Wangchuck – re-unified Bhutan through military force – founded Bhutan’s hereditary monarchy – aided British invasion of Tibet in 1904
1865	Treaty of Sinchu La – Britain annexed all of the Duars to British India – paid an annual indemnity of Rupees 50,000 to Bhutan
1904	British Younghusband Expedition invaded Tibet and captured Lhasa
1904	Anglo-Tibetan Convention – Britain forced Tibet to recognize British control of Sikkim, open Tibet to British Indian trade, and pay a substantial indemnity
1907-1926	King Ugyen Wangchuck ruled Bhutan – conquered his rivals and instilled political stability – isolated Bhutan from foreign influences – made little economic progress
1911-1912	Republican Revolution – military mutinies, secessionist movements – Puyi, 5-year-old Qing emperor abdicated

- 1912 Great Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso (1876-1933) declared independence – but Britain chose to recognize Chinese sovereignty – Tibet had tenuous freedom
- 1926-1952 King Jigme Wangchuck ruled Bhutan – consolidator of the monarchy
- 1937-1945 Japan invaded China – conquered large parts of eastern China – but could not defeat Nationalists in west or Communists in north
- 1941-1945 China aligned with Allied Forces in World War II – American military provisioned Nationalist army on Burma Road from India to Yunnan and by air with Flying Tiger lift
- 1947 Great Britain granted independence to India – preferred democratically to disgruntled colony – little remaining economic benefit
- 1949 Communists defeated Nationalists – Nationalists had mismanaged economy, carried out brutalities, permitted corruption
- 1949-1976 Mao Zedong led Communist China – centralized power – restructured Chinese society – had strong military, police control
- 1950-1951 army of the People's Republic of China gradually conquered Tibet – entered Lhasa in October 1951 – US and UK refused to support independence of Tibet against China

- 1952-1972 King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck ruled Bhutan – ended serfdom, redistributed land, created National Assembly – opened Bhutan to foreign trade/aid, invested in infrastructure
- 1959 Tibetans protested Chinese collectivization – Mao destroyed Buddhist monasteries and temples, collectivized feudal estates, and installed direct rule
- 1949 The 14th Dalai Lama and 80,000 supporters went into exile, mostly in Dharamsala, India – sought international support for Tibetan rights
- 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution in China – Mao’s attempt to regain power – 2 million people investigated – countless others harassed by Red Guards – ethnic minorities persecuted in Yunnan
- 1972-2006 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck ruled Bhutan – far-sighted reformer – initiated economic development – transferred political power to an elected parliament
- 1978-1997 Deng Xiaoping led China – market-oriented economic policies – tight political repression – Special Economic Zones in south
- 1979 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck introduced Gross National Happiness – goal based on socioeconomic development, environmental preservation, promotion of cultural values, representative governance

- 1989 The 14th Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize – for promoting Tibetan autonomy within China through effective international diplomacy – China protested
- 1997 Deng Xiaoping died – Jiang Zemin became President, Zhu Rongji became Premier – deepened Deng’s reform-for-growth policies
- 2006-present King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck ruled Bhutan – crowned in 2008 – focused on democracy and development – worked with elected prime ministers and parliament
- 2008 Bhutan elected its first parliamentary government – devolution of power from the King has been slow and incomplete
- 2013 Xi Jinping became President of China, Li Keqiang became Premier – steered China on a nationalist path seeking greater world power
- 2014 Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Narendra Modi won election in India – liberalized foreign investment regulations, enacted a Goods+Services Tax, reduced fuel subsidies
- 2018 parliamentary election in Bhutan – Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (Bhutan United) Party won (55 percent) – Lotay Tshering became Prime Minister – King retained most power
- 2019 Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Narendra Modi won re-election in India – Modi promised further economic reforms

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Sites Visited in the Himalayan Region – Bhutan and China (Tibet and Yunnan)

**Bhutan Suitcase Seminar
Stanford Travel/Study
October 20-November 4, 2011
Land-based**

Thimpu, Bhutan

Thimpu is the capital of Bhutan and the country's largest city (about 100,000 residents). In 1885, Ugyen Wangchuck, the founding king of the reigning Wangchuck dynasty, defeated the *dzongpon* (local ruler) of Thimpu and unified Bhutan. The elegant Tashichhodzong, a former fortress/monastery in Thimpu, now houses governmental ministries, the king's secretariat, and the staff of the *Je Khenpo* (the top Buddhist official). Nearby is the palace of Bhutan's 32-year-old fifth king, Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, and his new bride, Ashi Jetsun Pema, who were married on October 13-15. Pictures of the honey-mooning royal couple (whom we saw on their way to the airport in Paro) were everywhere. Widespread construction projects in the booming capital reflected the rapid economic progress in Bhutan. Income in the small country of 700,000 has been growing at 9 percent annually, based on exports of hydroelectricity to India.

Our group spent a stimulating two days in Thimpu. We visited the Memorial *chorten* (Buddhist shrine) dedicated to the modernizing third king (who ended serfdom in Bhutan in 1956 and died in 1972). Later, we drove up to the Changgangkha Lhakhang temple to observe a chanting monk and to obtain spectacular views of Thimpu city. We went into several classrooms of the government-sponsored National Institute of Zorig Chosum, where thirteen of Bhutan's traditional arts and crafts (including weaving, carving, and painting) are taught to young artists. We also paid a visit to the impressive National Textile Museum,

which contained exhibits of the national costumes of many of Bhutan's diverse (Tibeto-Burman and Nepalese) ethnic groups. On our last night in Thimpu, nine government officials joined us for dinner and openly shared their views on the country's Tantric Buddhist religion, new democratic politics, and bright economic future.

Bumthang, Bhutan

Nine hours of exciting driving through scenic valleys (planted in rice and turnips) and high mountain passes (where yaks grazed) brought us to Bumthang in central Bhutan. Bumthang Valley is a highly revered place in Bhutan. It is believed that Guru Rimpoche, the 8th-century saint whom the Bhutanese regard as a second Buddha, first began to overcome vicious Bon deities in Bumthang (the animistic Bon religion pre-dated Buddhism in Bhutan). Moreover, the reigning Wangchuck dynasty, which originated in Bumthang in the 19th century, traces its lineage back to Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), Bhutan's most renowned *terton* (revealer of scriptures and statues left by the Guru). The contemporary town of Bumthang, located at an elevation of 8,400 feet, houses about 15,000 residents. It is currently undergoing widespread reconstruction because it suffered two serious fires last year, which destroyed many of its wooden structures.

We had two very full days of touring historical sites and experiencing life in Bumthang. We visited the 7th-century Jampa Lhakhang (one of the two oldest Buddhist temples in Bhutan), the 17th-century Jakar Dzong (a fortress-monastery, which today houses government offices and a Drukpa Buddhist monastery), the 20th-century Namkhey Ningpo Dratshang Monastery (privately supported to train Nyingmapa Buddhist monks), the 17th-century Kurjey Lhakhang Monastery (where the first three kings of Bhutan are buried), and the 16th-century Tamshing Temple and Monastery (which houses discoveries and paintings of Pema Lingpa). We also paid visits to a very impressive government school (which had 965 pupils attending grades one through eight) and to a farm

house (where we saw buckwheat noodles being made and tasted those noodles plus home-made rice wine and roasted rice and maize snacks).

Trongsa, Bhutan

Trongsa, an incredibly beautiful little town in the Trongsa Valley on the eastern edge of central Bhutan, commands a critical location in the country. The historical struggles between rulers of central and western Bhutan typically took place in Trongsa. In the 19th century, Jigme Namgyal and his son, Ugyen Wangchuck, served successively as governors (*penlops*) of Trongsa and conquered and re-unified Bhutan from that key central site. In 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck was crowned as the first king of Bhutan, initiating the Wangchuck dynasty that continues to reign today. All crown princes first served as penlops of Trongsa before becoming kings of Bhutan. Today, Trongsa is a spectacularly scenic, but small town of just 3,000 permanent residents. It continues to house the provincial government of Trongsa region and serves as a collection center for agricultural produce in the rich Trongsa Valley.

Our Stanford group spent only one day and night in Trongsa, because the little town has only two key historical buildings to visit. The Trongsa Dzong is a very interesting collection of buildings, started in 1644 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the first unifier and spiritual leader of Bhutan. Like all dzongs, the one in Trongsa houses both government offices and a monastery, reflecting the joint (secular-religious) form of monastic government that the Shabdrung established. The well-located dzong earlier controlled both east-west trade and military movements in Bhutan. Above the dzong, the Taa Dzong was constructed to serve as a five-story watch tower to warn dzong officials of troop movements in the Trongsa Valley and surrounding mountains. In 2008, the Taa Dzong was converted into a magnificent museum that contains significant relics of Himalayan Buddhism and historical memorabilia of the first four Wangchuck kings.

Punakha, Bhutan

The Punakha Valley has been the heart of Bhutan since the Wangchuck dynasty began ruling in 1907. Punakha town is sited at a strategic site – at the confluence of two rivers (the male and female rivers) in the most easterly valley of western Bhutan. The small city of Punakha was the capital of Bhutan until 1955, when the capital was moved to Thimphu. The Punakha Dzong (monastery/government center) is the most beautiful and important dzong in the country. The central monastic body (the chief abbot (*Je Kenpo*) and 1000 other key monks) reside in the Punakha Dzong in the winter and in the Thimphu Dzong in the summer. Three Wangchuck kings have been coronated in the Punakha Dzong, most recently the 5th king in November 2008. Between October 13 and 15 this year, the wedding of the 5th king and his new queen was held in the all-purpose room of the Punakha Dzong. The wedding ceremony was broadcast live throughout Bhutan.

We visited three impressive sites in the Punakha region – a temple, the dzong, and a chorten (Himalayan Buddhist stupa). Chimi Lhakang (“no-dog temple”) is a temple near Punakha which commemorates a revered 15th-century lama, Drukpa Kinley, sometimes known as the divine mad-man, because he practiced Buddhism eccentrically and had a substantial sexual appetite. The Punakha Dzong, located in the town, was refurbished between 1987 and 2001 (following a destructive fire) and is now the most incredible dzong in Bhutan. The embalmed body of Bhutan’s divine, 17th-century unifier, Shabdrung Ngawang Nyamgal, lies in a temple in the dzong in a room that is accessible only to the king and the chief abbot. Outside Punakha in the village of Nezigang, we hiked up a steep hillside to visit the Khamsum Yuley Namgay Chorten, a stunning, three-story stupa completed a decade ago by the queen-mother to protect the 5th king.

Paro, Bhutan

Paro is Bhutan’s second largest town with 35,000 inhabitants. Because the only airport in Bhutan is located outside Paro, it is the hub of the

country's growing tourist industry. In 2010, Bhutan received 42,000 tourists, each staying five days on average. Each tourist is required to spend at least \$250 per day (of which \$65 is tax). Paro has played a key role in Bhutan's history. Most Bhutanese Buddhists believe that in 747 Guru Rinpoche flew to a mountain-side cave near Paro on the back of a consort tigress. The Guru is credited with introducing Tantric Buddhism into Bhutan and subduing the violent deities of the previous Bon religion. In the 17th century, Shabdrung Ngawang Nyamgal built one of his principal dzongs in Paro. After his death in 1651, Paro became the seat of the governor (*penlops*) of western Bhutan. When Jigme Namgyal dominated the country in the late 19th century, he defeated the penlops of Paro, paving the way for Bhutan's unification.

In Paro, we visited the architecturally-magnificent Rinpung Dzong, formerly Paro's principal fortress. Like all of Bhutan's dzongs, Paro's dzong was built by the Shabdrung and today houses government offices and monasteries. The dzong has a stunning view of the Paro Valley and of Paro town, with snow-capped Himalayan peaks in the background. Several of us made the challenging, five-hour climb up to the Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery, which is sited at an elevation of 10,000 feet and required an elevation gain of 2,200 feet. That monastery, Bhutan's most famous pilgrimage site, commemorates Guru Rinpoche and the cave in which he is thought to have meditated in the 8th century. He is considered a second Buddha and is venerated in Bhutan. All Bhutanese Buddhists are expected to make at least one pilgrimage to pray at the Tiger's Nest Monastery during their lifetimes.

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**Legendary Cultures By Private Jet
TCS and Starquest Expeditions
March 12-April 1, 2011
Airplane-based**

Lijiang, Yunnan, China

China has enjoyed three decades of phenomenal economic growth. National income has grown at an average annual rate of 9 percent since 1980 and thus is now about \$7500, fifteen times its 1980 level. Even the remote provinces, like Yunnan Province in southwestern China, of the world's most populous nation (1.35 billion people) are booming. Construction cranes are visible almost everywhere, new highways are connecting formerly remote regions to the center, and new national parks feature enormous visitors' centers. Recently affluent Chinese people have become active tourists in their own country, and holiday weekends attract mobs of visitors to the remote parts of China that have pleasant climates, interesting minority ethnic groups (Han Chinese constitute 94 percent of the country's total population), and newly refurbished tourist facilities.

Lijiang, a town of 200,000 in northwestern Yunnan, is home to the Naxi people. The 300,000 Naxi speak a Tibeto-Burman language and have a pictographic script. To the north of Lijiang is the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain (13 peaks, some at elevations of over 18,000 feet), which is sacred to the Naxi. We drove to the base of that mountain to marvel at the Impression Lijiang cultural performance, featuring 500 Naxi dancers, singers, and drummers. The incredible show, performed in a magnificent natural setting, was produced by the man who created the introductory show for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. We later enjoyed a tour of the Dongba Culture Museum. Dongba, the Naxi religion, is a syncretistic blend of Tibetan Buddhism and shamanistic ancestor-worship. The cobble-stoned Naxi old town in Lijiang (Dayan) is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Our group toured Dayan and the Mu Mansion, once the home of Lijiang's ruling family.

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The Himalayas By Air
Bushtracks Expeditions
March 21-April 6, 2008

Airplane-based

Putao and Pagan, Burma

Our group's feelings about the current state and future of Burma (Myanmar) were directly opposite to those we held for Bhutan. The long-ruling, repressive military dictatorship continues to keep Aung San Suu Kyi (who won the election of 1990, which the junta then voided) under house arrest, create high inflation and run the economy into the ground, and depend on China for political, economic, and military support. The resilient Burmese people struggle to survive, but positive change does not appear likely. Whereas Bhutan was holding its first election, Burma was emerging tentatively from another junta crackdown, following political demonstrations last September. In spite of the oppressive political atmosphere, resilient Burma retains its charm and hope. The country has good economic potential – it was the world's leading exporter of rice 80 years ago – and its 51 million people are delightful, notwithstanding the country's widespread poverty. In late 2004, I spent two and one-half marvelous weeks in Burma but the situation has deteriorated noticeably since then. Our group joined me on a visit to Thu-Htay-Kan village, where Generosity in Action (GIA) had built a well six years ago. I was very moved when, at the end of the expedition, our participants donated a sizeable sum to GIA in my name to assist continuing developmental efforts in Burmese villages.

We visited two very different parts of Burma. Our first stop was in Putao, located in the far north of Burma. Although the Himalaya Mountains are visible from the Putao Valley, the town of 30,000 people is sited at an elevation of only 1,800 feet. Putao is accessible by road during only half of the year (the dry season). We drove a half hour out of the town to stay in the delightful Malikha Lodge, a gem in the heart of this almost magical, remote region. Malikha Lodge, sited on the banks of the Namlang River, is exquisitely designed, appointed, and managed. Our group wandered through nearby villages (populated by Lisu and Rawang peoples) – on foot or aboard elephants – and floated down the

Namlang River – on paddle-driven rubber rafts or in long-boats. We took challenging hikes alongside rice paddies on paths made slippery by recent downpours. At night, we watched a Lisu dance troop perform something akin to line dances, with a caller dictating the uniform steps and movements. Most of all, we relaxed in the luxury of a beautiful place, built in the middle of a remote sub-tropical rainforest.

We next flew south to Pagan, the former capitol of an important Burman kingdom, the Pagan Kingdom (9th-13th centuries). The wealth and power of Pagan were derived mainly from irrigated rice production. To commemorate their conversion to Theravada Buddhism in the mid-11th century, Pagan kings gradually donated two-thirds of the kingdom's rice-growing land and bonded laborers to Buddhist temple societies. As a consequence, about 4,000 Buddhist temples were built in two centuries (ending about 1250), all within an area of nine square miles. Nearly half of them remain intact today. Pagan's monumental religious excesses weakened the kingdom and made it vulnerable to an invasion by an army from Khubilai Khan's Yuan Chinese Empire in the late 13th century, which debilitated the kingdom. But the Mongol/Chinese army was prevented from entering Pagan city, and the temples thus were largely preserved. We began our exploration of Pagan in a magnificent fashion, by flying over the region for an hour in hot-air balloons. To avoid gusting winds, balloon flights are made very early in the morning. We photographed the sun rising over wondrous Pagan. Following the balloon ride, we had guided visits to a few of the key temples to gain an admiration for the creative architectural, artistic, and construction skills of a devout, medieval people.

Zhongdian, Yunnan, China

We reached the eastern edge of the Himalaya Mountains in Yunnan Province, located in southwestern China. Following nearly three decades of phenomenal economic growth (national income in China has grown at an average annual rate of 9 percent since 1980 and thus is now about ten times its 1980 level), even the remote provinces of the world's

most populous nation (1.3 billion people) are booming. Construction cranes are visible almost everywhere, new highways are connecting formerly remote regions to the center, and new national parks feature enormous visitors' centers and newly-constructed boardwalks. Recently affluent Chinese people have become active tourists in their own country, and holiday weekends attract mobs of visitors to the remote parts of China that have pleasant climates, interesting minority ethnic groups (Han Chinese constitute 94 percent of the country's total population), and newly refurbished tourist facilities. In Zhongdian, the town that we visited in northwestern Yunnan Province, we discovered that the "old town," the city center that once housed ethnic minorities, had very recently had a full makeover and been converted from ethnic housing to tourist shops, bars, and restaurants. Chinese entrepreneurs rarely pass up an opportunity to make a sale.

Zhongdian is on the southeastern corner of the Tibetan Plateau, 120 miles north of Lijiang and very near to the borders with the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Burma (Myanmar). Zhongdian has a mean elevation of 10,000 feet. The name of Zhongdian (Gyelthang in Tibetan) was officially changed to Shangri-la (Xianggelila in Chinese) in 2001. (Shangri-la in Tibetan means "sun and moon in the heart" and connotes idyllic beauty.) Zhongdian is still inhabited mostly by Tibetans (who make up three-fourths of the town's 70,000 residents), but in recent years Han Chinese have migrated in to trade and exploit the region's mineral resources (gold, silver, copper, and iron). Evidence of the Tibetan religion is prominent – lamaseries, prayer flags, and Buddhist scriptures in Tibetan script. We visited the Sumsanling Monastery, the largest Tibetan Buddhist lamasery in Yunnan, which was built in the 17th century by the Fifth Dalai Lama, ravaged during the Cultural Revolution, and rebuilt recently to house 900 monks. We also spent a delightful morning in the new Potatso National Park – hiking for a mile on a boardwalk alongside Shudu Lake, watching yaks and dzos (yak-cattle cross-breeds) graze, and enjoying spectacular scenery as our bus climbed over 13,500 feet through a mountain pass. One evening, we were chilled with an early-Spring snowfall.

Chengdu, Sichuan, China

We had originally planned to visit Lhasa in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. But the Chinese authorities closed Tibet to tourism after the violent March demonstrations in which Tibetans were demanding greater political and cultural autonomy within China. At the last minute, therefore, we had to change our itinerary. We chose instead to visit Chengdu, the capitol of Sichuan Province, China's most populous (87 million people). To fly from Zhongdian to Chengdu, we had to connect through Kunming, the capitol of Yunnan Province. We took advantage of a half-day stop-over in Kunming to visit another UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Stone Forest. Our visit to the Stone Forest was fascinating. The site features extensive karst formations (naturally eroded limestone rock sculptures, akin to stalagmites). Because we were there on a holiday long-weekend, we were swept in a high tide of Chinese tourists (the Stone Forest receives 3 million visitors annually, and most seemed to be squeezing through the rock formations with us).

In a day and a half in Chengdu, we managed to see three of Sichuan's most notable attractions. (Those of us who were adventuresome or foolhardy enough to sample the genuine Sichuanese cuisine, correctly reputed to be the spiciest in China thanks to a judicious use of red chili peppers, wondered if we were ever going to see anything again.) The world's largest stone-carved image of the Buddha is in Leshan, about 100 miles south of Chengdu. We drove to Leshan, took a boat down the Min River, and observed all 71 meters (230 feet) of that monumental statue. We also took pedicabs up to the top of the statue so that we could observe the Buddha's head (adorned with jack-fruit-like curls) at close range. Upon returning to Chengdu, we visited the new Jinsha Museum, a remarkable creation, which houses the recent archaeological finds from the capitol of the 3000-year-old Shu Kingdom. Historians of China had been unaware that the Shu Kingdom in Sichuan was so old and wealthy. In 2001, a construction crew began digging up fabulous jewelry and implements made of gold, bronze, and jade. The articles in

the new museum are breath-taking and beautifully presented. On the last day of our expedition, we went to the Panda Research Institute near Chengdu. The Institute is much more than a zoo for visitors to observe both giant and lesser pandas. It also serves as a breeding facility. In 2007, nine baby giant pandas were born there – four pairs of twins and one individual – and all are doing very well. The Institute has more than 50 adult pandas (adult males weigh up to 300 pounds and adult females up to 250 pounds), but breeding is very difficult because females are in heat for less than a week per year. China estimates that it now has about 3,200 pandas in the wild, and most of them reside in the mountains of Sichuan Province at elevations of 6,000-13,000 feet. Wild pandas are nocturnal and thus are extremely difficult to observe.

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