Tibet and the Dalai Lama are two terms that are almost always mentioned as a pair, with the latter being a modern-day advocate for his nation’s freedom from China. In the documentary film *Dalai Lama: The Soul of Tibet* viewers are taken through the journey of the life of the 14th Dalai Lama, from his selection as the Dalai Lama to his current situation in exile.

The film begins with an overview of the situation in Tibet just prior to the 14th Dalai Lama’s appointment. The 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso, felt as though his home of Tibet was going to be under threat from China in the near future, and feeling as though his life was going to be coming to an end in some time, believed that it would be better for his country if he were to pass away and be reincarnated earlier, so that ‘he’ would be of age and better prepared to fight against China as the 14th Dalai Lama.

Upon Thubten Gyatso’s death, a group of his closest followers and monks travel out to find his reincarnation disguised as nomads. Based upon hints related to a lake and letters seen there by the 13th Dalai Lama, the travelers end up in the region of Amdo in Northern Tibet. There, they meet a family and are intrigued by one of the young children there, Lhamo Thondup. The boy seems to be quite intelligent for his age and immediately takes one of the traveler’s bead necklaces and claims
“It is mine!” in a fluent Tibetan dialect that is only spoken in Lhasa, which Lhamo had learnt himself. The monks believe that the boy could potentially be the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and give him a test by placing many objects on a table, some of which were the possessions of the previous Dalai Lama. The boy chooses the correct items without any hesitation, and from that the monks are convinced that he is the next Dalai Lama. Lhamo is then taken along with his brother to Lhasa, where he is renamed as Tenzin Gyatso, and begins his rigorous training to eventually become the leader of Tibet.

Over the years the Dalai Lama spends every day studying inside the Potala Palace at the center of Lhasa, and tries to find glimpses of life outside the palace whenever possible. One opportunity came in the form of Austrian traveler Heinrich Harrer, who was appointed as Tenzin’s photographer and filmmaker. Amidst many negotiations with China about leaving Tibet in peace these films helped distract him from the stress that he felt at such a young age.

One night during the Dalai Lama’s teenage years a huge firing is heard in the distance, it is the sound of the Chinese red army marching forward to cease Tibet. Tenzin is immediately told to leave, and, disguised as a soldier, he and a few thousand Tibetan’s escape Lhasa and travel to the Indian border. Once there he is greeted by the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, but is privately told by Nehru that India will not risk its peace treaty with China over Tibet. The Dalai Lama is allowed to take refuge in the Northern town of Dharamsala, where he and his people must try to rebuild their lives and maintain Tibetan culture outside their home.
Many events take place over the coming years, including a war between India and China, yet Tibet still remains under Chinese rule as the ‘new’ China cultural revolution takes over the country as they destroy anything in Tibet related to religion despite the Dalai Lama’s peaceful protests.

In 1989 the Dalai Lama is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in freeing Tibet from Chinese rule, and this brings a lot of attention and fame to both the Dalai Lama and the issue itself. The Dalai Lama then begins to travel around the world giving teachings and spreading awareness of the issue in countries including the United States, where many Hollywood actors get behind the issue and help spread awareness.

Currently, the Dalai Lama is traveling between 6 and 9 months in a year, and spends the rest of his time in Dharamsala meeting with people who seek peace and helping maintain Tibetan culture as much as he can. While the situation in China does not seem to be completely solved, Tibet has at least been recognized as an Autonomous region within China, being allowed to practice some of their culture, but not their religion.

This film covers a large span of events throughout the Dalai Lama’s life, but one message is clear above the others, and that is that he is a man who will never give up fighting for his homeland but at the same time try his hardest to maintain peace, two things that don’t always go together. This documentary serves as a biography of the 14th Dalai Lama’s life thus far, and is intended not only for scholars, but
anyone interested in learning about his life and goals due to its detailed yet not too technical descriptions and discussions of the issues within Tibet.

Tibet doesn’t share much culturally with what is generally known as central Asia, even though politically it is in a somewhat similar situation to both Xinjiang and Mongolia in that they are under Chinese rule. However, the way in which the regions deal with this rule are different. There are several news stories of cars running over people and fights breaking out in Xinjiang, however, in Tibet the only form of protest comes from self-immolating, even if it is against the Dalai Lama’s will, because the Tibetans want to protest in a way that does not harm anyone except themselves.

In the film, there are several key events that shaped the Dalai Lama’s life. The first of these is the invasion of Tibet by China. Previously, there had been many negotiations between the Dalai Lama and Mao Zedong of China, but in the end these negotiations proved worthless to Mao as he ordered his army to take control of Tibet. The reason why Mao was adamant that Tibet is a part of China comes from the country’s history with Tibet, and that Chinese always believed Tibet was a part of them. “The claim that Tibet entertained only personal relations with China at the leadership level is easily rebutted. Administrative records and dynastic histories outline the governing structures of Mongol and Manchu rule. These make it clear that Tibet was subject to rules, laws and decisions made by the Yuan and Qing rulers. Tibet was not independent during these two periods.”

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Mongolia, ancient Tibet has had many relations with China and even if they did not agree, the Chinese ideology was that Tibet has and always will be a part of China. The Dalai Lama being forced to flee to India was a huge moment in the history of Tibet because it left Lhasa and all of its citizens to be subject to Chinese rule, a lot of which was brutal, yet there was nothing the Dalai Lama could do to stop them.

Much later, many years after fleeing, the Dalai Lama received the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts against China, and this gave him a huge amount of fame. This event can be seen as one of the most important recent events because it made the issue of Tibet global. Awareness levels grew and people across the worlds were backing the Dalai Lama in his fight against China. The Dalai Lama is almost solely responsible for the amount of attention that Tibet has gotten as Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, both in a similar situation to Tibet, but without a great leader.

The film *Dalai Lama: Soul of Tibet* may be a biography, yet it tells a story of one man’s continuous struggle against a whole country in a way that clearly shows that traits for which the 14th Dalai Lama has become such a respected global figure. His strength to be able to leave his homeland and take refuge in another country yet still continuously fight for his homes freedom speak volumes. Moreover, the fact that he has accomplished as much as he has with minimal violence is what makes him such a well-respected person around the world. Even though China is still in control of Tibet, he has made progress over the years, and has sometimes been forced to compromise, but the spiritual and political leader of Tibet has taken on a
completely different role than any of his predecessors would have predicted and he has done it well all the same.

**Bibliography**

