

The New York Times: “The Succession of the Dalai Lama” [C1]

L'anziano leader spirituale non vuole che Pechino approfitti di un vuoto di potere al momento della sua morte, ma deve fare i conti con un elemento fondamentale del buddismo tibetano.

The Dalai Lama has spent decades in exile thinking about ways to prevent the Chinese government from taking control of Tibetan Buddhism after his death and ending the struggle for Tibetan autonomy. Early on, he suggested that the institution of the Dalai Lama could be ended altogether to deprive Beijing of a target to exploit. Later, he focused on how to keep the Chinese Communist Party from installing its own choice to succeed him. He floated a sharp break from precedent, saying he might transfer his spiritual powers to an adult during his lifetime to avoid the vacuum that would come with selecting a child as his reincarnation and successor. But in July, as senior monks filed into a much-anticipated conference in Dharamsala, India, as part of the 90th birthday celebrations for the Dalai Lama, he made clear that tradition would prevail. The institution of the Dalai Lama, he said, will continue. And his successor will be selected through the usual process of reincarnation. His decision reflected the fine line that even a modernizing Dalai Lama must tread between preserving a core element of Tibetan Buddhism and shielding it from political manipulation by Beijing. It showed the limits of his powers to reshape the institution he has towered over for more than seven decades, as well as his pragmatic understanding of Tibetans' David-vs.-Goliath struggle against the Chinese government. "The issue in probably any religion, but especially a religion where you have a leader who is modernizing, is how far can you push your community to take up a new approach," said Richard Barnett, a scholar of Tibet at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. "He may have sensed that the community wasn't quite ready to take this new step of succession," he added. Still, even as the Dalai Lama seemed to close a door on some out-of-the-box ideas, he sought to lay down boundaries that would shut out an authoritarian Beijing. He made clear that his office had "sole authority" in identifying the next Dalai Lama. "No one else has any such

authority to interfere in this matter," he said in a video message to the monks. His statement, which he read through large reading glasses from a sheet of paper he held in front of him, emphasized the consultative process through which he had reached his decision on the matter of succession. The Chinese Communist Party, which has sought to erode the influence of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, asserts that only it has the authority to choose his reincarnation, despite being committed to atheism in its ranks. The Dalai Lama, the 14th to hold the role, fled China in 1959 after the Chinese army invaded Tibet to bring the region under the control of the Communist Party. He has lived in India ever since, helping to establish a democracy in exile while travelling the world to advocate autonomy and cultural and religious freedom for the Tibetan people. The Chinese government sees the octogenarian leader as a separatist who seeks independence for Tibet, where more than six million Tibetans live. In his absence, Beijing has tried to bring elements of the Tibetan religious institution under state control. It has also worked to erase Tibetan culture in order to absorb the people into one nation united around the Communist Party. There are clear signs that Beijing could dispute the selection of the next Dalai Lama. When the 10th Panchen Lama, Tibet's second-highest spiritual figure, died in 1989, the Dalai Lama named the five-year-old son of a herder as the successor. The boy and his family were kidnapped by China, and the boy — who has not been seen since — was replaced with a monk chosen by Beijing. Traditionally, the search for a new Dalai Lama begins only after the current one dies. Tibetan Buddhist leaders say they follow ancient customs of parsing mystical visions, clues left by the previous Dalai Lama and astrology to help narrow their search. In the past, search committees would travel around Tibet testing candidates to see if they showed any traits that could be deemed especially holy. This process can take years. Eventually, a child is deemed to be the previous Dalai Lama's reincarnation. Another decade or more can pass while the child is educated and prepared for the role when he reaches maturity. The fear that China will exploit that gap has shaped the Dalai Lama's strategy ever since he and tens of thousands of his followers went into exile. In 2011, the Dalai Lama completed a process of gradually relinquishing his political leadership role in the Tibetan exile government, a decision intended to strengthen the democratic structure of the Tibetan movement. Since then, Tibetan

refugees **scattered** around the world have elected their political leader through a direct vote. Lobsang Tenzin, the **second-most-senior** leader of the trust that will **oversee** reincarnation matters, who is known by his religious title of Samdhong Rinpoche, said the Dalai Lama had **weighed** the future of the institution for decades but over time found that Tibetan people favoured preserving it. Analysts said that was consistent with the image the Dalai Lama has cultivated as a democrat who seeks consultation. While the approach may be his nature, it also makes a clear contrast with authoritarian China, they said. “Today’s message,” Samdhong Rinpoche said at a news conference in Dharamsala, “is that the Dalai Lama institution will continue — that after the 14th Dalai Lama, there will be a 15th Dalai Lama, there will be a 16th Dalai Lama.” He did not say how the Dalai Lama planned to shield the reincarnation process from Chinese interference. He also declined to say whether the Dalai Lama’s statement emphasizing the traditional process of reincarnation now **ruled out** his earlier suggestions about breaking with precedents. “When the time comes, he will give instructions,” Samdhong Rinpoche said, referring to reincarnation. © 2025 The New York Times Company. **This article originally appeared in **The New York Times**. **

Glossary

- **floated** = programmare, pianificare
- **tread** = percorrere
- **clues** = indicazioni
- **traits** = tratti, qualità
- **ruled out** = escludere, scartare
- **altogether** = del tutto
- **avoid** = evitare
- **take up** = accettare
- **deemed** = ritenere, considerare
- **weighed** = ponderare, valutare
- **Early on** = fin dall'inizio
- **deprive** = privare
- **core** = fondamentale
- **committed** = dedicarsi, impegnarsi
- **oversee** = supervisionare
- **gap** = vuoto
- **scattered** = disperdere, spargere
- **second-most-senior** = la seconda carica più importante
- **shielding** = proteggere
- **towered over** = troneggiare, dominare
- **shut out** = escludere
- **erase** = cancellare
- **herder** = pastore
- **fled** = fuggire
- **parsing** = interpretare
- **narrow** = ridurre
- **filed into** = entrare in fila
- **out-of-the-box** = fuori dagli schemi
- **boundaries** = limiti
- **sought** = cercare
- **asserts** = affermare
- **holy** = sacri
- **relinquishing** = rinunciare

- **ranks** = fila
- **sharp break** = rottura netta