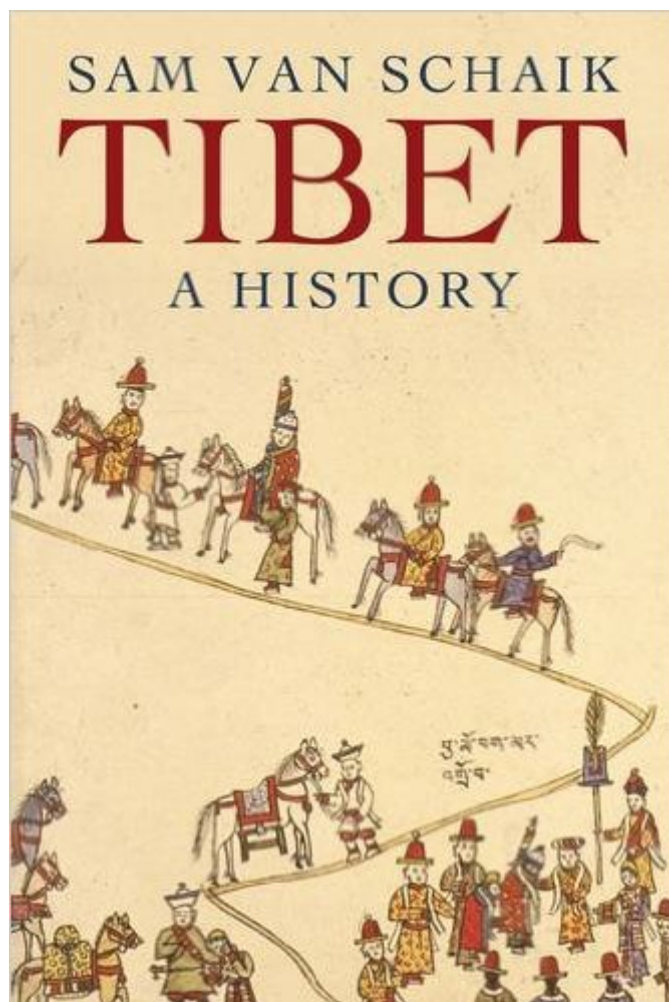


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Tibet: A History



Synopsis

Situated north of the Himalayas, Tibet is famous for its unique culture and its controversial assimilation into modern China. Yet Tibet in the twenty-first century can only be properly understood in the context of its extraordinary history. Sam van Schaik brings the history of Tibet to life by telling the stories of the people involved, from the glory days of the Tibetan empire in the seventh century through to the present day. He explores the emergence of Tibetan Buddhism and the rise of the Dalai Lamas, Tibet's entanglement in the "Great Game" in the early twentieth century, its submission to Chinese Communist rule in the 1950s, and the troubled times of recent decades. Tibet sheds light on the country's complex relationship with China and explains often-misunderstood aspects of its culture, such as reborn lamas, monasteries and hermits, The Tibetan Book of the Dead, and the role of the Dalai Lama. Van Schaik works through the layers of history and myth to create a compelling narrative, one that offers readers a greater understanding of this important and controversial corner of the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anyone looking for information on China's claims to Tibet, or what really happened when China invaded, or if the Dalai Lamas really were "god kings" (hardly) will want to read this book. I appreciate that the author has no political axe to grind and simply tells a story drawn from meticulous research. Dalai Lama admirers and detractors alike will find surprises here. And, blessedly, it is so well written I found myself getting completely absorbed in the story as I read. The story told in this book begins more than a thousand years ago, but the work is NOT so

overburdened with historic minutiae that it becomes a slog to read, as so many academic histories are. Even so, the work is genuinely informative. Van Schaik does a masterful job clearly explaining what needs to be explained so that events make sense. Historic figures (including lamas) are portrayed honestly, neither deified nor demonized. I highly recommend this book for anyone looking for a factual, succinct, and readable history of Tibet.

I read this book (and several on China) prior to taking a tour of China in June 2012 including a couple of days in Tibet. My rather minimal knowledge of Tibet had been limited to reading the endless Dalai Lama vs. China news stories of the last half century. As noted by reviewer O'Brien, this is a clearly written history and Van Schaik has no political axe to grind. The history of conflict between the Chinese and Tibetans goes back to the 7th century and has continued on and off ever since. There has also been violent conflict within Tibetan society during their history usually involving Buddhist sects. This can be a little surprising if one has heard nothing but how Buddhism is devoted to finding interior peace. However it is not that much different from Western history - religion, politics and human nature frequently lead to war and intolerance. My brief time in Lhasa revealed a tense atmosphere and a country undergoing changes - cultural changes forced on them by the Chinese as well as the influence of the modern world. The local tour guide admitted he had to be careful with his statements to us. He did say that tourism, a growing source of income in the area, was much more limited in 2012 than in 2011. This was apparently due to recent "self-immolations" by Tibetan Buddhist monks. The Chinese government limits outside visitors when Tibetan protests are in progress. The military and police, who were prominent throughout China, were more heavily armed in Lhasa. This is a time of continuing change and conflict in Tibet. The same is true within China and between China and all of its neighbor countries. It is helpful to us on the outside to have an understanding of the history of both China and Tibet. This book is an excellent contribution to that understanding.

The content of the book looks wonderful. However...Yale was unable to secure the rights to reproduce the pictures. It would have been nice to know that before I made the purchase. On the page. (Perhaps I might have seen it in the preview, but I didn't and I haven't checked if it was visible.) And telling you to check the printed version just makes it worse. If I'd had access to the printed version, I wouldn't have bought the electronic version. Plus the maps are unreadable, at least to my eyes. I expect better from Yale, a great university press. And .

Five, because I am enjoying it so much. It's very well researched, and written succinctly, almost chatty and intimate - certainly without the odour of scholasticism. It adds to the growing recent histories that are dispelling the all-too-romantic ideas of Tibet the westerners often seem so infatuated with. Schaik is intelligent and balanced. I'm very keen to see how he treats the last sixty years - so I'll update this when I've finished!

I have enjoyed Sam van Schaik's translations of important Tibetan Buddhist texts and after reading his latest (Tibetan Zen: Discovering a Lost Tradition) and really enjoying its historic and archeological flavor discovered this book. I have also read several other history books on Tibet over the past 4 decades but find this one the most enjoyable and informative, sympathetic but also psychologically and historically perceptive. Van Schaik takes a narrative approach to weave an engrossing, balanced and fascinating tale of this unique culture's complex history. Too often in popular culture (both political and religious) Tibet gets painted with broad and romantic brush strokes. The actual story told here is much more human and interesting. If you are really interested in getting a firm and broad grasp of Tibet's history I strongly recommend getting a copy of A Historical Atlas of Tibet by Karl Ryavec to have as a reference and supplement when reading van Schaik's book.

Excellent book, clearly written, jargon-free. Vast historical perspective of Tibet's conflict-ridden formation. Analysis underlines the historical formation of common practices, values, institutions, traditions, historical stories, identities, etc. among Tibetans, along with the production of differences and hierarchies among themselves and others --i.e., always in relation with different groups from both neighbouring and distant lands. No reification, no romantic essentialist perspective, but complex, relational, conflicting and cohesive historical processes. Fantastic contribution to our understanding of the ongoing historical formation of peoples and their conflicting claims of unity, common territories, identities, etc. No good/evil, indigenous/foreign dichotomies taken for granted, but critically analysed. Hence, radical partisans of China-centred or idyllic-Tibet-centred perspectives are going to be challenged. Enjoy it.

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