

Definition: **Lamaism** from *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*

An obsolete English term that has no correlate in Tibetan, sometimes used to refer to the Buddhism of Tibet. Probably derived from the Chinese term lama jiao, or “teachings of the lamas,” the term is considered pejorative by Tibetans, as it carries the negative connotation that the Tibetan tradition is something distinct from the mainstream of Buddhism. The use of this term should be abandoned in favor of, simply, “Tibetan Buddhism.”

Summary Article: **Lamaism**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Buddhism of Tibet, Mongolia, and parts of Nepal and northern India; a form of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Buddhism was introduced into Tibet in AD 640, but the real founder of Tibetan Buddhism was the Indian missionary Padma Sambhava, who was active in about 750. Tibetan Buddhism developed several orders, based on lineages of teachings transmitted by reincarnated lamas (teachers). In the 14th–15th centuries Tsong-kha-pa founded the sect of Geluk-Pa (‘virtuous’), which became the most powerful order in the country. Its head is the Dalai Lama, who is considered an incarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Persecution The Dalai Lama, residing at the palace of Potala in Lhasa, exercised both spiritual and temporal authority as head of the Tibetan state, aided by the Panchen Lama. However, in 1959, following an unsuccessful uprising against the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the 14th Dalai Lama fled the country.

Before Chinese communist rule, it was estimated that one in four of Tibet's male population was a Lamaist monk, but now their numbers are greatly reduced. Prayer wheels and prayer flags, on which were inscribed prayers, were formerly a common sight in the Tibetan countryside; when these were turned by hand or moved by the wind, great spiritual benefit was supposed to accrue.

Tibetan Buddhist practice Ordained Tibetan Buddhists wear deep red robes. Worship is regarded as a natural part of daily life, and involves music, such as the playing of longhorns; chanting; the acting out of Buddhist stories in dance; and the use of mantras and prayer wheels. Tibetan Buddhists emphasize the bringing of all the senses to worship, and take items to their shrines to signify touch (water), sight (flowers), smell (incense and perfume), taste (food), and sound (shells).

Two pots of water are offered, one symbolizing touch, and to honour the Buddha by washing his feet, the other for the Buddha to drink. The flowers that represent sight, also signify beauty and impermanence. Perfume or incense not only symbolizes the sense of smell, but is also intended to create a beautiful atmosphere. Food is offered to the Buddha, representing taste and the honouring of a guest. Candles or lamps are lit to signify the light of understanding. A shell that can be blown to produce a sound represents hearing. In this way, Tibetan Buddhists bring their whole being to devotion and meditation.

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images

Lhasa

Lhasa

Tibetan monk

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