

The University of Colorado - Boulder in conjunction with Aarhus University presents:

The Dalai Lama: A Conference on Leadership, Devotion, and Succession***

September 12-13, 2024

The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is 88 years old and has served in his position for 74 years as the leader of Tibet. In the past, when a Dalai Lama died, his followers searched for his reincarnation. However, the Dalai Lama has announced an innovation: he will announce his succession plans in 2025 at age 90. At this time, the search for the next Dalai Lama will begin. The interregnum will arguably be one of the most significant periods in the history of Tibet, and possibly of Global Buddhism. In 2022, an interdisciplinary, international group of scholars launched a research network to document and learn from the Dalai Lama in this important moment. In September 2023, we gathered at Aarhus University (Denmark) for a conference on “The Legacy of the Dalai Lama: Innovation and Possible Futures.” In September 2024, we will gather at the University of Colorado (USA) for a conference focused on leadership, devotion, and succession.

What are the qualities of a leader across multiple reincarnations? How does devotion take shape around both person and office? And, what might succession look like in the fraught geopolitical landscape of contemporary Tibet, that of both Chinese communist rule and exile Tibetan government? In Boulder, we will bring together a group of scholars and Tibetan community leaders for research presentations and discussion of the role of devotion in both leadership and succession. Our discussions will explore both current and historic practices, including how devotion has been elicited and maintained among supporters over time and across reincarnate lineages. How, also, does devotion work in relation to secular leaders historically and in both Chinese-occupied Tibet and the exile democracy? What combinations of, for example, charisma, loyalty, and heritage comprise devotion? The cultural, legal, political, and religious structures that endow a Dalai Lama with their power are absent during the interregnum period; devotion enters a waiting period of risk and anticipation. Our conference in Colorado is devoted to the qualities of leadership and the possibilities of succession in relation to the innovative, iconic 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet.

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