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*Why the Dalai Lama is not a Pope*  
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Perhaps the two best known religious leaders in the world are the pope and the Dalai Lama. The pope is the leader of the world's Catholics, while the Dalai Lama is the leader of Tibetan Buddhism and has been the religion's most recognizable public figure for decades.

Given their high profiles, we often think of these two leaders as similar. Both lead their respective religions. Both claim to lead a country even though the Dalai Lama is exiled from Tibet and the pope heads a nation of only a couple square miles in size.

The Dalai Lama, however, is not a pope. This becomes most apparent in the matter of succession. As we saw with the passing of Pope John Paul II and the elevation of Pope Benedict XVI, this is fairly straightforward in Catholicism.

When a pope dies, the Cardinals elect a new one. This process may take a week or two, or even a month, but fairly quickly a new pope is elected and the mourning for the previous pope becomes joy over the new pontiff. He takes up the reins of leadership and the business of the church continues. The momentum of papal leadership pauses only momentarily.

By contrast, the Dalai Lama succeeds himself. Tibetan Buddhists believe that each lama is a bodhisattva. This means that they have achieved enlightenment, but instead of going into nirvana, their compassion for others causes them to return to this world to help. Following the death of the current Dalai Lama, the 14th incarnation, he will be reborn as a baby and will have to grow up-remembering and learning about himself, his past lives, and Buddhism. He will even have to be found and identified. There will be little carry over in momentum from one Dalai Lama to the next. When this lama dies, Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism will lose an influential advocate.

The impact of the Dalai Lama's passing, which may not be for a couple of decades since he is only 70, will affect Buddhists differently from non-

Buddhists. Tibetan Buddhism will change little in and of itself while the next Dalai Lama grows up. The machinery of the religion will continue to function, members will worship and meditate, and other lamas will continue their leadership.

But for non-Buddhists, the Dalai Lama's primary importance lies in being the political leader in Tibet, in exile since the 1959 Chinese occupation of the country. When he passes away, there will be some sort of caretaker government, but it will lack an activist to carry the message of national freedom for Tibet as the Dalai Lama has done. Who knows what will happen, but of course, the worry is that the issue of Tibetan freedom on the international stage will fade away in face of continuing Chinese occupation.

The Chinese government has just complicated the question of the Dalai Lama's succession by issuing a law that requires all lamas to reincarnate in China. In other words, it is now illegal for a Tibetan lama to be born outside the country which the current Dalai Lama has said he will do. Despite the absurdity of trying to control a supernatural event, this rule signals China's intent to interfere in the next Dalai Lama's life in order to reduce his influence and the trouble he can cause for China's control of Tibet.

This situation will result in two Dalai Lamas, one in China (and controlled by them) and one outside of the country. The one in China will have direct access to the Tibetan people, while the one outside will have none, even if he is recognized by all as the legitimate incarnation.

The Chinese move should be seen as giving the government a puppet Dalai Lama who will have the ability to propagandize Tibetans on China's behalf, at the least, and could even be set up to govern them. Surprisingly, China's constitution guarantees religious freedom, but this new law certainly seems to contravene that promise.