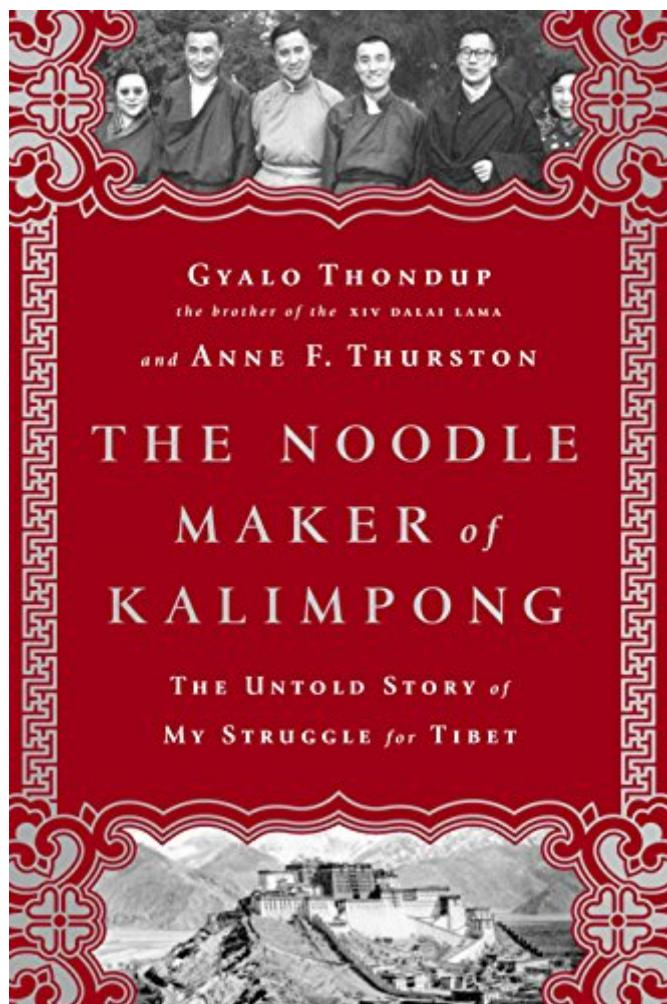


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The Noodle Maker Of Kalimpong: The Untold Story Of My Struggle For Tibet



Synopsis

In December 2010 residents of Kalimpong, a town on the Indian border with Tibet, turned out en masse to welcome the Dalai Lama. It was only then they realized for the first time that the neighbor they knew as the noodle maker of Kalimpong was also the Dalai Lama's older brother. The Tibetan spiritual leader had come to visit the Gaden Tharpa Choeling monastery and join his brother for lunch in the family compound. Gyal Thondup has long lived out of the spotlight and hidden from view, but his whole life has been dedicated to the cause of his younger brother and Tibet. He served for decades as the Dalai Lama's special envoy, the trusted interlocutor between Tibet and foreign leaders from Chiang Kai-shek to Jawaharlal Nehru, Zhou Enlai to Deng Xiaoping. Traveling the globe and meeting behind closed doors, Thondup has been an important witness to some of the epochal events of the 20th century. No one has a better grasp of the ongoing great game as the divergent interests of China, India, Russia and the United States continue to play themselves out over the Tibetan plateau. Only the Dalai Lama himself has played a more important role in the political history of modern, tragedy-ridden Tibet. Indeed, the Dalai Lama's dramatic escape from Lhasa to exile in India would not have been possible without his brother's behind-the-scenes help. Now, together with Anne F. Thurston, who co-wrote the international best seller *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, Gyal Thondup is finally telling his story. The settings are exotic—the Tibetan province of Amdo where the two brothers spent their early childhood; Tibet's legendary capital of Lhasa; Nanjing, where Thondup received a Chinese education; Taiwan, where he fled when he could not return to Tibet; Calcutta, Delhi, and the Himalayan hill towns of India, where he finally made his home; Hong Kong, which served as his listening post for China, and the American Rockies, where he sent young Tibetan resistance fighters to be trained clandestinely by the CIA. But Thondup's story does not reiterate the otherworldly, Shangri-La vision of the Land of Snows so often portrayed in the West. Instead, it is an intimate, personal look at the Dalai Lama and his immediate family and an inside view of vicious and sometimes deadly power struggles within the Potala Palace—that immensely imposing architectural wonder that looms over Lhasa and is home to both the spiritual and secular seats of Tibetan power.

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Customer Reviews

I think it's important to understand that what's presented in this book is one man's perceptions of history, which should be taken with a large grain of salt. Fortunately, the co-author, Anne Thurston, makes this clear in her afterword, and offers corrections to some of the inaccuracies. In order to get a more well-rounded understanding of some of the seminal events and controversies in the story, readers should seek out other sources dealing with the the regency period during the 14th Dalai Lama's childhood and the events leading up to his flight from Tibet. Gyalo Thondup is the only source I'm aware of who was steadfastly pro-Chinese, even after the Chinese had invaded Eastern Tibet (!), and who, likewise, viewed the Reting Regent favorably. He conveniently omits the fact that his brother, the Dalai Lama, publicly denounced the Regent as highly corrupt, not only as a political figure, but as a monk. However, I would say that the book is instructive in understanding the mindset of the people around the Dalai Lama who favored cooperation with the Chinese (these include the DL's father). Some of the information in the book strains credulity. For example, we're told that the Chinese supported the landowning elite, and appointed members of it to important government posts. Why would a revolutionary army and a Marxist government do such a thing? The author makes no attempt to explain. More discussion and analysis of apparent contradictions like this are needed in order to make sense of such claims, especially in view of testimony from the few Westerners, like Anna Strong, allowed into Tibet after the Chinese invasion, who observed that it was the slaves and peasants who were elevated to government posts. While it's true that some of the estate owners favored reform, the majority did not. Thondup's criticisms of the CIA's role in Tibet,

though well-deserved, also ring a bit hollow, considering his glaring omission of the fact that he, the Dalai Lama (and in turn, his exiled government) and other family members were comfortably supported on the CIA's payroll for a number of years. Books by the DL's family members pack a punch as much for what they neglect to say, as for what they do say. Insights regarding how the theocracy's inherent conservatism held back not only Tibet's material progress but its political survival in time of crisis, and how diplomatic errors and government myopia deprived Tibet of opportunities to defend itself or achieve a measure of self-governance post-invasion, are the real contributions this book makes to the historical record and debate. Approached as a complimentary volume to other testimony and analysis of Tibet's transition from independent nation to Chinese colony, this book contributes to an understanding of a complex and sometimes murky historical period.

My feelings were mixed while reading this book. It presents memoirs of Gyalo Thondup, the current Dalai Lama's elder brother who has been intimately involved all his life in the struggles of the Tibetan people. It is written in English by journalist Anne Thurston. On the one hand, I was keen to read about the Tibetan struggle from the perspective of one who is very close to the Dalai Lama, and who has played an important role in the Tibetan struggle. This book provides an excellent opportunity for me to look more closely at the complex background to the international controversies surrounding Tibet. Thondup's memoirs cover family history going back a few generations. He talks about childhood with his siblings, and how recognition of his younger brother as the incarnate Dalai Lama would change their lives forever. He chronicles Tibet's relationship with the Nationalist, and later the Communist, government of China, going into the involvement of India, the American CIA, the Soviet Union, and others. The memoirs take us up to the current decade of the 21st century, now that Thondup operates a noodle factory in Kalimpong, India. It is eye-opening to read about what the Tibetan people have experienced over almost a century. On the other hand, as I read through the book, I could not help but feel that Thondup has a tendency to rush to hasty conclusions without detailed or careful analysis. This is a point that Thurston raises and elaborates in her Afterword at the end of the book. Thondup also describes his brief encounters with a few well-known historical figures, as a result of which he has formed strong negative views that do not appear to be entirely warranted. As such, I could not be sure that I was reading an account that is entirely accurate, or fair. In all, an interesting book for anyone who wishes to take a closer look at the Tibetan situation.

One of the best books about modern Tibetan history from the time the current Dalai Lama was appointed as the 14th Dalai Lama till early 2000s. It gives you a good idea of all the dirty politics of those so-called Tibetan aristocracies who gave up the country. It illustrates the dirty politics from the self-servicing countries like India and USA. This book also details how/what was done after the Dalai Lama and Tibetans escaped to India. It's pretty amazing what Tibetans have achieved in exile for their welfare, but not so much for the cause of the Tibet. I would like highly recommend this book to someone who is interested on Tibet.

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