Prism of Tibetan images and realities | One generation of Tibet Lovers in Kalimpong, India

Jacqueline A. Hiltz
The University of Montana

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3307

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

** Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature**

Yes, I grant permission ✔
No, I do not grant permission __

Author's Signature  _______________

Date: 11/30/94

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken
A PRISM OF TIBETAN IMAGES AND REALITIES:
ONE GENERATION OF TIBET LOVERS
IN KALIMPONG, INDIA

by
Jacqueline A. Hiltz
B.A. Stanford University, 1984

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts in History
The University of Montana
1994

Approved by:

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

December 1, 1994
Date
"A Prism of Tibetan Images and Realities: One Generation of Tibet Lovers in Kalimpong, India" focuses on the Occidental romance with Tibet. It begins with a general exploration of the phenomenon by examining the trends in Western intellectual and cultural history which provided the foundation for interest in Tibet. Examination of themes such as the complicated, centuries-old relationship between Tibet and China and some Tibetan realities juxtaposed with Western perceptions of the "Land of the Snows" provide key background information for the focus of the study.

More specifically, the setting for the paper is the eastern Himalayan town of Kalimpong in India, the terminus of the Lhasa-India trade route. The context is the early 1950s, the defining years of the cold war, when Tibet struggled to convince the world of its independence in the hopes of thwarting the advances of the Chinese Communists. In Kalimpong, a stone's throw from Tibet, another generation of Tibet lovers, the German Lama Govinda, Austrian Heinrich Harrer, Scot George Patterson, Briton Marco Pallis, and Russian George Roerich, converged to pursue their quest for the myth of Tibet. The group represents a collage of "contending fantasies." Yet, their diverse imaginings assumed a common coherence as each sought in his unique way to "save Tibet," that is, the Tibet that he envisaged, from an unfortunate and tragic destruction.

The final component of the paper suggests that the United States developed a substantial though unofficial connection with Tibet at this time, partially through Kalimpong's eclectic gathering of visionaries.
PREFACE

This paper grew from my emotional response to a contemporary issue—the "Tibetan question" in the late 1980s. My travels in Tibet in the spring of 1987 had inspired me to join an organization in Seattle, Washington called the Tibetan Rights Campaign. Since I do not consider myself a political or "cause" person, it was an anomalous move for me. Nevertheless, I donated some time and money and persuaded a few individuals to write to their Congressmen insisting they vote to revoke China's Most Favored Nation status, in light of the gross human rights abuses in Tibet. I am not the only American who has been inspired by this cause. Here, at the University of Montana, Professor Philip West invited me to explore why the very mention of Tibet today produces such an emotional outcry among Americans.

Although the focus of this study is somewhat narrower than the above, it has allowed me to think about and refine some of the larger questions concerning Tibet. The project has been educational for me on both an intellectual and a personal level. Not only do I now have a rudimentary understanding of the role that Tibet has played in the imagination of the West; I have also found a way to temper my emotional response to the "plight of Tibet" with a consideration of some of the complexities of the issue. As well, I have now begun to appreciate why the myth of Tibet resonates with me and why I was drawn to Asia—why I continue to be captivated by Asia.

Thanks are due to my thesis committee: to my adviser, Professor Philip West, for his mentoring and understanding; to Professor Alan Sponberg for his insightful comments and his help in arranging my meeting with Sangharakshita; and to Professor Richard Drake for his concern and his continuous plug for a focus.

Thanks also to Cathy Brown and Professor West and the Mansfield Center for providing the means for transportation and living expenses in London.
INTRODUCTION

Scene 1

1935 A small planeload of Westerners led by British diplomat Robert Conway has just fled the war-torn city of Baskul, China. They are headed toward Shanghai. As the plane distances itself from the tragedy—the 10,000 natives that will be annihilated—Conway, England's "Man of the East" and new foreign secretary, contemplates his future diplomatic role. With idealistic fervor, he announces to his doting younger brother George, also on the plane, that his strategy as a foreign secretary will not follow tradition; he will not use the sword to gain influence and settle disputes. With one sarcastic swoop, however, he destroys his impracticable plan: "Then I'll be slapped right into an insane asylum."

The world is much too complex for such idealism and innocence. Conway has reached a crossroads but realizes he will toe the line and "be the best little foreign secretary they've ever had." He does not have the "nerve to do anything else."¹

Scene 2

Kalimpong, India. July 16, 1951. Robert H. Linn, the American Consular Attaché at Calcutta, has arranged three plans for the Dalai Lama's escape to India—should the young leader decide to leave Tibet and thus defy the encroaching Chinese Communists. The most complicated and outrageous plan involves the expertise of two daring Europeans, the Austrian Heinrich Harrer and Scot George Patterson. Together, the adventurers would travel in disguise to meet the Dalai Lama in Yatung, a village in southern Tibet, close to the Indian border. They would then escort the revered youth to

¹ This is a description from the movie Lost Horizon directed by Frank Capra in 1937 (132 min.). The movie was based on the novel, Lost Horizon, by James Hilton, 1933.
INTRODUCTION

safety in India.²

The vignettes--disjointed as they appear--are indeed connected. One of the tasks of this paper will be to find and articulate their relationship. The larger link is Tibet; the smaller link, the one that will be the anchor of this study, is the eastern Himalayan town of Kalimpong, India, in the early 1950s. But let us begin with the bigger picture.

Mysterious. Peaks. Magical. Secret. Lamas. Forbidden. These are the words that a significant number of European and American authors, writing in the first half of the twentieth century, used in the titles of well-known books about Tibet. Advertising and marketing ploys aside, these nouns and adjectives suggest an exoticness and elusiveness about Tibet that persists to this day. The forced annexation of Tibet to China in 1959, the relative ease of travel to Lhasa these days, and today's information explosion might have resulted in wholesale demystification of the "Land of the Snows." On the contrary, today the "Tibetan question" occupies an important position in discussions between the United States and China and helps to define American foreign policy. Tibet as landscape, now invoked as an ecological paradise of the past² and repository of "ancient wisdom," that is, Tibetan Buddhism, continues to engage the Western imagination in ways that baffle logic.

The Occidental romance with Tibet has a rich history--composed of generations of Tibet enthusiasts--that reveals much about the fears and aspirations of the West. After briefly exploring the history and dynamics of this unique relationship, I will set up the historical and psychological context for the main task of this study.

The setting for the focus of the study is Kalimpong, a caravan town in the eastern Himalayas of India, not far from the Tibetan border. It was here in the early 1950s that a

generation of Tibet lovers converged to pursue their quest for the myth of Tibet. An examination of how Tibet was directly experienced and imagined by these Westerners will be very illuminating. In a sense, they formed a microcosm of Western imaginings about Tibet at mid-century. It was an era of disillusionment and despair, the fledgling years of a cold war staged between the conflicting ideologies of capitalism/democracy and communism, where the potential for nuclear annihilation informed thoughts of the future. The various personalities and different conceptions of Tibet—although, in a sense, unified by the times as we shall see—reflect, too, the "imaginal complexity" that is Tibet.3

Sources

The interdisciplinary nature of this project—which includes history, politics and diplomacy, psychology, and religion—has necessitated the use of a wide range of sources. Major sources of information were secondary texts, oral interviews, firsthand accounts, the diplomatic and political archival records of the United States (published and unpublished), and, to a much lesser extent, the British Government of India, newspapers, magazine and journal articles, and film.

I used secondary sources to piece together the centuries-old fascination with Tibet in Western cultural history, and also gain a sense of Tibet's past. Some examples of the texts include Peter Bishop's The Myth of Shangri-la [1989] for Western imaginings of Tibet, Melvyn Goldstein's A History of Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State [1989] for Tibetan history, Robert Wohl's The Generation of 1914 [1979] for an intellectual and cultural history of the inter-war period, and Stephen Batchelor's The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture [1994] for a sketch of Western contact with Buddhism.

Interviews with two individuals animated my research in a way that archives and

---

publications cannot. Sangharakshita, an English Buddhist who lived in Kalimpong from 1950 to 1964, gave me a sense of the general flavor of Kalimpong in the 1950s and details about some of the individuals in the study. In addition, he provided me with background information and references to other pertinent works. I am grateful to him for giving me so much of his time on such short notice. He has many more stories to tell. Lowell Thomas, Jr. was kind enough to answer some questions in a telephone interview and to send me a retrospective article on his travels to Lhasa with his father in the summer of 1949.

Communication with both of these individuals, each linked in his own way to my work, has inspired me greatly. They have helped me to see this exciting time not merely as the past of four decades ago but as yesterday.

Firsthand accounts are narratives by the main characters of the story and other minor figures associated with the times and themes of my study. I used these revealing accounts as a basis for understanding the general character and specific personalities of the generation of Tibet lovers in Kalimpong. Biographies and other types of publications supplemented the testimony of the individuals. Published and unpublished United States foreign relations documents provided the means to reconstruct the involvement of the United States with Tibet, and, specifically, to establish the extent of American political activity in Kalimpong. Finally, magazine articles provided widespread information about some key events and people related to the task at hand.
I
TIBET IN THE WESTERN IMAGINATION

REASON, ROMANCE, AND THEOSOPHY

In 1949, President Harry Truman wistfully confessed to Lowell Thomas, Jr. at the completion of his highly publicized and broadcasted trip to Lhasa with his father, the famous CBS news broadcaster, that he had "long dreamed of visiting Lhasa, but that he would probably never have the opportunity."¹ General Douglas MacArthur announced a similar desire to the elder Thomas during an interview in Japan just before the American expedition set off for "Forbidden Tibet."² Tibet captivated the imagination of these two famous and influential Americans. Yet, Truman and MacArthur are but two of the many individuals spanning modern Western civilization who have been similarly seduced. Indeed, there is a rich, vast, and complex history of the West's fascination and romance with Tibet.

Peter Bishop's The Myth of Shangri-la: Tibet, Travel Writing, and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape (1989) is one of the most comprehensive—spanning the years 1773 to 1959—and interesting works devoted to an illumination of this curious Occidental obsession. By meticulously examining the extensive body of travel writing on Tibet--diaries, histories, letters, and literature by Western explorers, travelers, diplomats, mystics, missionaries, adventurers, and artists--Bishop draws some enlightening conclusions about the relationship of the West to the "Land of the Snows" Two simultaneously arising currents within Western thought, Romanticism and Orientalism, which Bishop discusses at length, provide a good setting from which to begin probing into

this Western fantasy.

A Revolution of the Human Spirit

The Enlightenment and Romanticism were the two poles of European intellectual life during the eighteenth century. Proponents of the Enlightenment viewed the adaptation of man to his environment as the basis of all scientific and moral decisions. They equated the structure of the mind to the structure of nature. Because of man's ignorance and stupidity and his religious and political tyranny, the structure of society was out of line. The enlightened intellectualism of the late eighteenth century was designed to "correct that fault, to line up mind, society, and nature into one unitary system." The Romantics, led by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the Swiss-born philosopher and writer, embraced the notion of shedding civilized life which was, to them, but a corruption of human nature. In opposition to the belief in progress through rational knowledge and science, the Romantics proclaimed that the heart and feelings convey a man's understanding of the truth more fully than the mind.

While the Enlightenment concentrated on critical, analytic, and scientific understanding, the Romantic exalted the power of the creative imagination and the role of feeling and intuition. The Romantic experienced a sense of profound isolation within the world and an equally terrifying alienation from society. These two experiences, metaphysical isolation and social alienation, were the two distinguishing signs of the Romantic. As industrialization inflicted an increasing sense of predictability, monotony, and

4 Morse Peckham (editor), Romanticism, The Culture of the Nineteenth Century (New York: George Braziller, 1965), p. 17
5 The generalization here should not be interpreted as meaning that the men of the Enlightenment had no understanding of the importance of feeling in human life. For example, David Hume, one of the greatest figures of the Enlightenment, said that "reason is and ought to be the slave of passions" and found "the basis of moral life in feeling." Voltaire swore that without passion there would be no human progress. [Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Book 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 24]
6 Peckham, p. 19.
and repetition on the world and mass civilization became the norm, poets and authors like Lord Byron (1788-1824), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) pursued imagination and emotion, an exaltation of the primitive and common man, an appreciation of nature, a spirit of seeking and adventure, and a penchant for the melancholy.

Disillusioned with both Church and Reason, many Romantics directed their spiritual yearnings toward an adoration of nature or faced East. The Romantic nature worshippers, whose foremost prophet was William Wordsworth, felt closer to the eternal while walking in spring meadows adorned with wild flowers or gazing at glistening, snow-capped mountain peaks. Indeed, many who had lost God in Church rediscovered him in what Wordsworth called the "solemn temple" of mountains; the mystery of the mountains became a symbol of the sublime. Germans and Austrians particularly, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, often conflated the elation of mountain climbing with the ecstasy of religious experience. Perhaps one of the most remarkable manifestations of Romanticism was the mountain climber whose superhuman effort finally climaxed in the conquest of Mount Everest in 1953. This feat brought together two important elements of Romantic thought: the inadequacy of society to meet the demands of the self and the exposure of this inadequacy through the release of energy in the activity which, to the socially adapted, can only be pointless.

7 Paul Hazard describes primitivism as "insistence on the value of simplicity, spontaneity, as compared with the artificial and the premeditated; the determination to seek the ideal pattern of humanity in the earliest ages, or in places into which contamination had not yet entered; the hope of discovering happiness by going backwards; a feeling of rebelliousness, of discontent with things as they were; maladjustments, regrets, longings, and, what was almost a physical sensation, a mighty hunger for fresh air, pictures which disprized the real, and invested some bygone age with a dreamlike beauty," European Thought, pp. 366-67.


9 Peckham, pp. 21-22.
Gazing East

The proponents of Romanticism who longingly gazed East echoed the words of Fredrich Schlegel (1772-1829), one of the leading figures of the movement, who declared: "In the Orient we must seek the highest Romanticism." India, the very cradle of humanity, the German Romantics declared, could overcome the materialism and mechanism of Occidental culture. Schlegel and the poet-philosopher Novalis (1772-1801) were convinced that India was mother to an original and universal religion that could provide the antidote to a worn out and shallow Europe. With the guidance of ageless Oriental wisdom, a new and revitalized Europe would arise from ashes of the old.10

Advocates of colonial expansion, those who often based their world view on the pre-eminence of reason, and the Romantics ostensibly stood on opposite ends of the spectrum. Yet, both groups held in common their fascination with what was considered the riches of the East—natural resources, cheap labor, and power over the masses for the colonialists, literature, religion, and philosophy for the Romantics. The former unequivocally rejected what the Romantics wholeheartedly believed: that everything of value had its beginnings in Asia. Explorers, missionaries, and colonizers long before had rationalized East as "its contrasting image, idea, personality, [and] experience."11 Romantics, however, embraced the Orient in a reconciling vision of wholeness.12

Orientalism as "Cultural Imperialism"

As European expansionists and Romantic lovers of the East alike plunged into the geographical and imaginal mapping of the "Orient," a whole scholarly enterprise called Orientalism developed and advanced. In his seminal work, Orientalism [1978], Edward Said, defines it as

12 Batchelor, p. 253.
... not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment... a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness.13

Specifically, since the middle of the eighteenth century, one of the principal elements in the relationship between East and West--Western hegemony over the East, according to Said--has been the growth of a systematic knowledge in the West about the Orient. The exploration and exploitations of European colonialism as well as "the widespread interest in the alien and unusual, exploited by the developing sciences of ethnology, comparative anatomy, philology, and history" has fortified this knowledge.14 In addition, the works of novelists, poets, translators, and travelers have contributed to the shaping and refining of Orientalism. Said argues that it is the method by which the West invented--and continues to invent--the East. It is a tool used in helping to shape definitions of Europe as "other."15 Orientalism, however, is not merely an activity confined to the solitary rooms of an ivory tower. It has had more directly political effects. The Orientalist inventions provided justification for imperialism and a foundation for colonial institutions. The fabrications have also played a role in shaping Western perceptions of Tibet.

In his book, The Awakening of the West, The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture [1994], Stephen Batchelor contends that

the break-up of European consciousness into its rational and romantic components was crucial in determining the West's understanding of Asia and Asian traditions (such as Buddhism). At the same time that Europeans were consciously constructing a map of oriental ideas to satisfy their rational intellects, they were unconsciously fashioning 'the contours of an imaginal landscape' that appealed to their romantic longings.16

To both lovers and haters of the Orient, "[W]hat mattered was not Asia so much as Asia's

---

13 Said, p. 6.
14 Ibid. p. 39.
15 Ibid. p. 1.
16 Batchelor, p. 254.
use to modern Europe."\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Madame Blavatsky and the Mahatmas}

The birth of the Theosophical Society in America during the last quarter of the nineteenth century reflects the wide influence of both Romanticism and Orientalism in the West. Theosophy, touted as a "revival of an ancient wisdom-religion based on contact with hidden Masters"\textsuperscript{18} was a response to the weakening of Christian beliefs in the latter half of the nineteenth century and a growing interest in the East. American spiritualism, part of the movement away from Puritan Christianity in the United States that began in 1848 and spread quickly there and throughout the rest of the world, provided the immediate context from which modern Theosophy emerged.\textsuperscript{19} The Transcendentalists, whose inspiration included European idealistic philosophy and Romanticism, participated in this protest against Calvinism. The Transcendentalists, most notably Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, were greatly influenced by Oriental religions and wholeheartedly embraced the wisdom they gleaned from Hindu literature and scriptures, such as the \textit{Upanishads}, and the great Indian classic, the \textit{Bhagavad-gita}. The Transcendental movement reflected a number of themes later to surface in Theosophy: eclecticism, antipathy to religious organization and to Christianity, and sympathy for Asian religions.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17}Said, p. 115.


\textsuperscript{19}In their essay "Theosophy and The Theosophical Society" (\textit{Modern Esoteric Spirituality}, eds. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman), Emily B. Sellon and Renée Weber describe the substantial pre-Theosophical Society roots of European theosophy as follows: "In the West, theosophy may be said to have originated in Pythagorean Greece and to have been elaborated by such figures as Plato, Ammonius, Saccus, and Plotinus, as well as through the Neoplatonic movement of Alexandria. It has affinities with kabbalistic and gnostic traditions and is a central doctrine in Islamic Sufism... In Europe, it reappeared from time to time under different guises: in hermetic and alchemical doctrines and in fraternal organizations like the Rosicrucians and the Freemasons. In the modern period, the term theosophy is most legitimately associated with such figures as Meister Eckhart, Giordino Bruno, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Jacob Boehme.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid. p. 8.
The Russian émigré, Madame Helena Blavatsky, the redoubtable and eccentric founder of the modern theosophical movement, and her disciples claimed to have discovered an ageless universal wisdom from which all manifestations of religion issued—an echo of the Romantic discovery in India. This tradition was preserved in an unspecified location in remote Tibet under the guardianship of the "Mahatmas," a mysterious brotherhood of spiritual masters organized into a body in the fourteenth century by the famous synthesizer of Tibetan Buddhism, Tsongkhapa. Interestingly enough, the Theosophists alleged that not only was the whereabouts of the Masters divulged just to a select elite; it remained unknown even to the Tibetans.\textsuperscript{21} Through telepathic communication and during an alleged seven year sojourn in Tibet in the mid-1800s with the Masters themselves, Madame Blavatsky had received their teachings which she transcribed and explained in her own writings, notably \textit{Isis Unveiled} [1877] and the \textit{Secret Doctrine} [1888].\textsuperscript{22} Blavatsky’s claims of contact with the Masters authenticated the tenets of Theosophy and lent authority to the movement.

Interestingly, the genius and appeal of Theosophy can be explained by its allegedly successful reconciliation of reason and romance, science and religion. It was a reconciliation for which the West had long yearned. A veritable smorgasbord of Oriental philosophical and religious ideas and concepts derived from Western science, Theosophy claimed to transcend the rift between science and religion by returning to the concerns of an ancient wisdom-tradition, long forgotten and transmitted from Tibet.\textsuperscript{23} The prevailing popularity of spiritualism, with which both Blavatsky and Henry Olcott, an American lawyer who founded Theosophy with her, were connected, confirmed the genuine possibility of sending and receiving telepathic messages from Tibet. The Mahatmas did not disseminate the worn out and empty ritual and dogma of a Puritanical Christianity but

\textsuperscript{21} Lopez, "New Age Orientalism," p. 38.
\textsuperscript{22} Campbell, p. 59. \textit{The Secret Doctrine} enunciates most comprehensively the metaphysics upon which the theosophical worldview rests.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. p. 35
the secret to "a science of the methodical development" of the human spirit--culminating in the Mahatmas themselves. The idea that a method for spiritual evolution actually existed and could be followed catered to the pervasive and uncritical belief in science.

From its inception, Theosophy drew upon Asian religions, namely, Buddhism which Madame Blavatsky greatly respected and interpreted in her own way, to formulate its doctrine. Although the new religion hardly resembled the ancient tradition as practiced in Asia, many confused Blavatsky's appropriation of certain Buddhist ideas with the Buddhist dharma. All Buddhist schools have taught that with the decline of Shakyamuni Buddha's dharma and the subsequent corruption of the world, another Buddha named Maitreya would appear to once again plant the seeds of Enlightenment. Theosophists elaborated on this traditional Buddhist belief by adding that one of the aims of the Mahatmas was to prepare humankind for the coming of Maitreya. The exact time of this epic arrival was ambiguous enough to allow Theosophists to declare themselves as the forefront of the future.25

The Seduction of the West: Occidental Fantasies of Tibet

Within the context of these currents and movements in the West--Romanticism, Orientalism, and Theosophy--the phenomenon of Western fascination with Tibet began to take shape. Tibet, with its wide, wind-swept plains, its feeling of desolation and loneliness, Tibet, surrounded by the highest and, arguably, most beautiful mountains in the world--the Himalayas to the south and the Kunluns to the northwest--appealed to the sensibilities of the Romantics who emphasized expansiveness and experienced uplifting emotional responses to landscape. The early Romantic fascination and interest in nature in general, and mountains, specifically, as the antidote to an industrialized society, ushered in

24 Shakyamuni Buddha, or Siddhartha Gautama as he was called before his Enlightenment, is considered by Buddhists to be the Buddha of the present age.

the beginning of a genuine wilderness aesthetic,\textsuperscript{26} a crucial development in the positive Western conception of Tibet.

The renewed interest in Eastern ideas and cultures, beginning with the Romantics and culminating in the scholarly work and activity defined as Orientalism, and in its scattered appropriation by Theosophy fixed Tibet on the map of imagination. The official British presence in Tibet since its association with India dating back to the last quarter of the eighteenth century established its geographical and political reality in the West. Tibetan isolation and success at thwarting colonization by both Russia or Britain and its feeble attempt to modernize, however, granted the country a unique position within the hallowed halls of Orientalism. Tibet became an object of imperial desire, and the failure of the European powers to dominate Tibet politically only increased European longing and added to the fantasy about life on the "Roof of the World."\textsuperscript{27} Peter Bishop notes:

There were, of course, many imaginative Tibets produced at the turn of the [nineteenth] century . . . But they all seemed to issue from a common center, each reflecting a fragment of some shared, overall concern. Said has insisted that "Orientalism depends for its very strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand." But Tibet seemed always to have the ability to elude the total embrace of Western Orientalism. It always sustained an independent Otherness, a sense of superiority, albeit limited.\textsuperscript{28}

Bishop's sense of a complex "otherness" for Tibet is more intuitive than substantiated--an observation that, in its ambiguity, is perhaps illuminating. Bishop illustrates the complexity of Tibet both with regard to its geographical location and historical and political association with Western powers:

\ldots Although ostensibly outside the matrix of historical space and time, Tibet was in fact integral to it--indeed vital to the stability of this matrix in Central Asia . . . [I]mperialism kept Tibet firmly connected to the struggle over global

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{27} Lopez, p. 39.
\bibitem{28} Bishop, \textit{The Myth of Shangri-la}, p. 145.
\end{thebibliography}
space and time. Yet its role was a no-man's land, a limbo place, a buffer zone, outside history and territorial acquisition. Bishop also asserts that Tibet's "peripheral place has given permission for the West to use it as an imaginative escape: a sort of time out, a relaxation of rigid rational censorship." Drawing upon the Tibetan role and image of the past, the current Dalai Lama seeks to return Tibet to its former status as buffer zone; he advocates the creation of a twentieth century Tibet that is war-free and nuclear-free. For Westerners, the fantasy continues.

Theosophy ushered in an age of Western enthusiasm for Tibet. It provided the West with its first popular exposure to Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism, albeit a diluted teaching, not Buddhism in its Tibetan form. The landscape and remoteness of Tibet, the existence of the mysterious and clairvoyant Masters, and, most importantly, the scientific and methodological nature of the new world view were crucial to the success of Theosophy as an outgrowth of a more "rational" Romanticism. In *The Awakening of the West*, Stephen Batchelor observes that Schlegel's call to find the 'highest Romanticism in the Orient' found its ultimate fulfillment in the discovery of the mystic Mahatmas concealed in Tibet. As one of the last remaining countries still to be explored and mapped by Europe, Tibet was the pre-eminent focus for romantic yearnings, a spiritual paradise unsoiled by Imperialist and materialist progress.

Westerners construed their visions of Tibet as intimately linked with the country's historical aloofness and interpretations of its reality by admirers whose direct knowledge of Tibet may have been questionable or even distorted for ulterior purposes.

Piggy-backed upon the spiritual yearnings of the Romantics and the Theosophical focus on Eastern religions, the nineteenth century obsession with Tibetan landscape receded to the background, and Tibetan Buddhism became the object of romantic

---

29 Ibid. p. 145.

30 Bishop, p. 7

31 One might argue that the Dalai Lama is drawing shrewdly upon Western perceptions of Tibet in order to re-establish some autonomy for his country.

32 Batchelor, p. 269.
In contrast to the view of nineteenth century scholars who condemned Tibetan Buddhism as a corruption and deviation of the "real" Buddhism, "Buddhist degeneracy," or even "deep-rooted devil-worship" in the words of the soldier-Buddhologist L.A. Waddell, twentieth century perceptions of Tibet were constructed from a Tibet that served as a storehouse of spiritual wisdom and the home of occult mysteries unknown in the West. This shift in emphasis can be better understood within the context of two destructive world wars which many Westerners explained as symptomatic of a fundamental flaw in Western civilization: it was spiritually empty.

WANDERING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: SHATTERED DREAMS AND DESPAIR

In Rites of Spring, The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age, Modris Ecksteins describes World War I, as the "psychological turning point... for modernism as a whole." Prior to this seminal event, ambivalence, at least in part, informed Western attitudes toward technology and Western civilization. But the Great War and its aftermath created an unprecedented crisis in Western consciousness. Europe plunged into a deep depression from which, one can argue, it has never recovered. Civilization based on the Enlightenment notion of progress, once an instrument of the dream for a better future, appeared to have turned on its head: "The urge to create and the urge to destroy had changed places." Disillusionment with Western culture and pessimism hovered gloomily over the Continent and the British Isles and, once again, impelled numerous individuals to

33 Bishop, p. 233.
35 As quoted in Lopez, "New Age Orientalism," p. 39. According to Ken Winkler (A Thousand Journeys, The Biography of Lama Anagarika Govinda [1990], p. 21). This condemnation of Tibetan Buddhism can be explained by the lack of credible research of Tibet in general and, specifically, in Tibetan Buddhism at that time. Lack of information was limited even though there was a popular interest in the country due to the abundance of adventure tales and fictional accounts. W.Y. Evan-Wentz's version of the Tibetan Book of the Dead [Oxford, 1927] had caused ripples of interest in Western academic circles but the book itself had not circulated that widely.
over the Continent and the British Isles and, once again, impelled numerous individuals to search for new meaning.37

The image of the traveler fascinated the intellectuals of the war generation.38 In *The Generation of 1914*, Robert Wohl explains that

. . . traveling offered nourishment to a spiritual life that was unable to sustain itself on its own resources and that was constantly on the verge of dissolving into suicidal despair. It was a liberation from the self for young men overwhelmed by the weight of their egos and the hopelessness of their time.39

The desire to seek faraway destinations and experience exotic cultures was symptomatic of a deep and universal need: the longing for renewal. The aspiration to be reborn and to cast off civilized lives led many Westerners to foreign lands. The intellectuals of the war generation found themselves irresistibly drawn toward the imagery of travel because they saw themselves as "wanderers between two worlds"--"one dead, the other powerless to be born." They felt that they were living in the "abyss between two times." From this belief in being doomed to roam between two worlds flowed a whole series of assumptions--among them the widespread belief that an entire world or culture was about to be renewed.40 But, the dream for this new world was shattered by the rise of the Communist and Fascist movements and the sudden eruption of violence in Europe's most progressive countries during the interwar period.

*Shangri-la*

The interwar period produced a whole genre of travel writing and fiction which

---

37 In *The European Mind, 1680-1715*, [New York: World Publishing Company, 1963, p. 7] Paul Hazard notes that by the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, Europeans "resumed the task which the sixteenth (century) had bequeathed it." From that time, Europe never ceased to explore the world at large. Travel became an "apprenticeship to life, a serious undertaking, the finishing touch to one's education." (Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954], p. 439). World War I, therefore, accelerated a process that had already been in place for over two centuries.


39 Ibid. p. 228.

40 Ibid. pp. 228-29.
addressed the malaise of Western culture. Paul Fussell discusses the genre in his study of British writers who traveled abroad between the wars, *Abroad: British Literary Travelers Between the War* [1980, Oxford]. One novel that epitomized and popularized the extreme disenchantment of the times is James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* [1933]. The best-seller, which was also quickly made into a film, opens with a small planeload of Westerners led by the protagonist, Robert Conway, fleeing war-torn China. The plane is hijacked to an idyllic valley in the Himalayas called Shangri-la where time has virtually stopped; it is a location that resembles Tibet and a description that, in many ways, sounds suspiciously similar to Western imaginings of Tibet.

Robert Conway, is a member of Wohl's "generation of 1914," an ex-soldier burnt out by his experience of war and disillusioned with his own culture. In Shangri-la, Conway finds an antidote to modern society. Yet what is perhaps most revealing about Shangri-la is not that its worth can be found in the knowledge of any secret Tibetan practices or beliefs. Rather, its value was predicated on the accumulation of the best of Western culture, literature, music, art, and the like, by an ageless Catholic missionary who sought to protect it from the inevitable destruction of the world. Both the location of Blavatsky's Mahatmas, which was unknown to the ordinary Tibetan, and the basis of the utopian Shangri-la suggest that the West, in spite of its obvious ambivalence, still viewed itself as having the upper hand.

**More Troubled Times**

1933 to 1948 proved to be trying years for Europe. The Depression left millions homeless and penniless. In January 1933, Hitler rose to power. Within a few years, millions of Central Europeans had been forced to abandon their homes and seek refuge in countries to the east or west. In 1934, Austrian Social Democracy, the strongest socialist...

---

41 Another novel that addresses the disillusionment with Western culture is Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* [Doubleday, Doran, and Co, Inc., 1944]
movement in continental Europe, was crushed. In July 1936, the Spanish Civil War erupted, bringing to an end the hopeful years of the Second Republic. Politics everywhere became "polarized between extremes of Left and Right." Europe seemed fated to wage another major war, as England and France proved powerless to check the ruthless thrust of Hitler's power. World War II, the Holocaust, and the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki exposed the world to unprecedented horrors. By 1948 "Europe had been humbled, defeated, devastated, impoverished, and taken under the control and protection of the two growing empires of the United States and the Soviet Union."42

During this fifteen year period, the United States had gained wealth, prestige, and power while sacrificing relatively little either in loss of life or physical damage. To the European intellectuals of the war generation, the U.S. "represented the triumph of industrial capitalism, the dominance of quantity over quality, the subjection of spirit to matter, and the reign of money and the mob," precisely those commonly accepted nineteenth century values that many intellectuals had promised themselves to overcome. As Western Europe stepped into the American orbit, their worst fears about the future were validated.43 To be sure, American intellectuals experienced discontent during these years as well. Yet, disillusionment in its totality would not characterize cultural life in the United States until the 1960s.

**The Reification of Tibet**

As the Romantics of the nineteenth century turned to India as a source of spiritual regeneration, the cure for the ruinous results of materialism and industrialization, disaffected Western travelers to the "Land of Snows" reified Tibet into a symbol of "everything the West imagined it had itself lost."44 According to Bishop, the West

42 Ibid, p. 234.
44 Bishop, p. 204.
"seemed to need at least one place to have remained stable, untouched, an unchanging center in a world being ripped apart. Many hoped that Tibet would be that 'still center.'"\textsuperscript{45}

This "still center," however, was imbued with diverse meanings. For culture enthusiasts, Tibet represented "the last of the Great Traditions." For the spiritually inclined, Tibetan Buddhism with its colorful pantheon of wrathful and peaceful protectors and rich, archetypal symbolism held the key to the mystery of life. For adventurers, it was the final, unexplored territory of the world with vast tracts of wilderness and, to boot, it was practically impossible to enter—the epitome of intrepid adventure and pristine wilderness. To the many who overlooked the turmoil of the twentieth century in Tibet, it was a land of innocence, where time stood still, and little had changed over the centuries. Interestingly, all of these projections were permeated with a sense of urgency that hinted at the ultimate impermanence of Tibet\textsuperscript{46} or the desperate anxieties of the Western perceiver. Tibet, as viewed through the prism of individual and collective Western desires and firmly established as place, might not survive the pressures and turbulence of modern times.

THE RHETORIC OF OPPOSITES: \textit{THE COLD WAR}

The immediate context for this study is the period just after World War II, the beginnings of a hostile cold war staged between the conflicting ideologies of capitalism/democracy and communism. One may argue that the Cold War was a creation of the West and an expression of the pervasive American mode of defining and shaping conflict. In a sense, the conflict was predicated on a rhetoric of opposites that had no room for subtlety. It is worthwhile to note that history of the West's relation to Asia has exploited the play of opposites, using dichotomous thinking to create chasms justifying

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, p. 206.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, p. 203.
imperialism, the conversion of non-Christians, and hegemony over the East in general. Terms such as West and East, Occident and Orient, Christian and non-Christian, reflect this duality.

Prior to this time, Tibet had never fallen into the category of "simple opposite." Bishop's sense of Tibet's complex "otherness" began to erode during the disillusionment of the interwar period when imaginings of Tibet evolved to represent simply the opposite of Western values. The transformation was completed when, ironically enough, communism, a creation of the West in its Chinese form threatened to destroy Tibet. Thus, the invasion of Tibet by the People's Liberation Army in 1951 was depicted as "an undifferentiated mass of godless Communists overwhelming a peaceful land devoted only to ethereal pursuits, the victims of the invasion including not only the hundreds of thousands of slaughtered Tibetans but the sometimes more lamented Buddhist dharma as well." Using images reminiscent of Lost Horizon and this oppositional thinking, Lowell Thomas, Jr. suggested a Tibet that can offer hope to the West:

Isolated as they are in their mountain kingdom, undisturbed in their monasteries by war, unrest, and the turmoil of modern civilization, they must have ample opportunity to reflect on the madness of the rest of the world.

Of course, the reality of Tibet was far more complex and colorful than the black and white portrait offered by Thomas.

---

47 Bishop, p. 212.
48 Ibid.
50 Thomas, Out of This World to Forbidden Tibet (New York: Avon Publications, 1950), p. 276
51 Peter Bishop notes that in Abroad: British Literary Travellers Between the Wars, Paul Fussell "tends to see the creation of overseas places at this time simply as a compensation for the gloom and despondency felt in Britain after World War I." (Bishop, p. 282). Bishop argues that the creation of the twentieth century Tibet was supported by the century-old tradition of Western imaginings about Tibet.
II

THE TIBETAN QUESTION

In the mid twentieth century, the handful of Westerners with a precise knowledge of the geography of the Himalayas and the history of modern India might have known Tibet best for the role it had performed during the glory days of the British empire as a buffer state between India and China. Prior to that, travelers, missionaries, explorers, diplomats, and artists caught fragmented glimpses of Tibet that revealed a mysterious and exotic country, one of the "most secret places of the earth."\(^1\) The reality of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the defining years of the cold war, however, exposed a troubled and tumultuous Tibet plagued by such mundane problems as internal strife, an inability to adapt to the rapid changes of the twentieth century, the youth and inexperience of the Dalai Lama, and lack of political decisiveness in a time that demanded it. Very soon, Tibetans would pay dearly for their self-imposed isolation and the romantic image.

THE PRIEST AND PATRON RELATIONSHIP

Perhaps the most urgent and difficult mission of Tibet during the years 1948 to 1951 was that of convincing the world of its independence.\(^2\) Traditionally, among the Tibetans, Chinese, and Europeans, there were three main interpretations of the status of Tibet with regard to China. One school viewed Tibet as independent, another as autonomous under Chinese sovereignty—much like the current relationship of Inner Mongolia to China, and the last as an integral part of China, that is, a Chinese province. To add a complicating twist, the Tibetan language uses the same word for "autonomous,"

---


\(^2\) Even today, this remains the most important mission for Tibet.
"sovereign," "suzerain," and "independent."

Historically, relations between Tibet and China have been complex and unique; the political ramifications of this unusual relationship have been difficult to establish in the context of twentieth-century realpolitik. It is not difficult, then, to see why some confusion regarding Tibet's association with China--not to mention indifference--prevailed among the Western powers.

The Sino-Tibetan connection dates back to the thirteenth century and is explained by historians in a variety of ways. Common threads of the narrative point to the destruction of Tibet—including the looting of several monasteries—in 1239 under the leadership of Godan Khan, grandson of the fierce Genghis Khan. It is unclear why the Mongols eventually put a stop to this violence, but there is speculation that Godan was impressed by the influence of the Tibetan lamas and summoned a Tibetan representative to his court. The Sakyas, one of the four principal Buddhist sects, sent Sakya Pandit, their head lama, accompanied by two of his nephews. Two decades after the Mongol invasion, the Sakya Pandit's successor and nephew won the confidence of Kublai Khan, the future chief of all Mongol emperor of China. Although Kublai Khan never converted to Buddhism, he sought religious guidance from the Lama of Sakya and became a powerful and devoted patron of Buddhism. Sakya Pandit's agreement to this spiritual tutelage, no doubt influenced by the secular power he might gain, gave him temporal authority over all of central Tibet. The peculiar relationship between Tibet and China, known as Y-mChod or choyon, was thus established. Translated as "patron and priest," this association, although never sealed by written agreement, maintained that the ruler of Tibet should be regarded as the religious adviser and priest of the emperor. The emperor in return functioned as patron and protector.

Over the next century, Tibet was thus loosely

---

3 Memorandum of conversation between American representatives at the consulate in Calcutta, Takste Rimpoché (elder brother of the Dalai Lama), and George Patterson, a Scottish missionary living in Kalimpong, India, dated 25 June 1951, enclosed with USFR, 611.93B/2-2851, Enclosure to despatch 625, letter from the American Consul General to the U.S. Department of State, dated 28 June 1951. Patterson, who acted as interpreter in the meeting, pointed out this difference in the Tibetan language. The participants agreed to refer to the Dalai Lama simply as the "Head of the State of Tibet" without any qualifying adjective.

Gradually, the influence of the Sakyas and the Mongols decreased, and the next three centuries ushered in another period of Tibetan independence. The rise of the martially inclined Manchus in the mid-seventeenth century--concurrent with the rise of the Gelugpas, one of the main Buddhist sects, in Tibet--led to eventual subordination of Tibet to the Qing dynasty at the turn of the century. Kangxi (1654-1722), the great Manchu emperor credited with consolidating the unwieldy Chinese empire, succeeded in establishing representatives at Lhasa in 1720. His written proclamation of 1721 assumed that Tibet had been in the position of tributary vassal for eighty years already. According to Snellgrove and Richardson, "From this time onwards the Manchu emperor was technically the overlord of Tibet; the relationship was based on no written treaty or written document, and the Tibetans have persisted in envisaging it in terms of the traditional concept of 'patron and priest'". The tide would turn once again.

As the Manchus lost power and influence in graphic illustration of the Chinese notion of dynastic decline, so, too, would their hegemony over Tibet diminish. After the death of the emperor Qianlong (1711-1799) in 1799, rebellions began to break out all over China. Although the feeble Manchu dynasty hung on and desperately until 1911, it was in no condition to come to the aid of its neighbors. Chinese authority in Tibet had become more figurative than real.

During the nineteenth century, Tibet might correctly be described as the "forbidden land." At this time, the Tibetans had become extremely wary of any foreigners who wished to set foot in their land. In particular, they feared British encroachments, and while on the one side, they took advantage of increasing Chinese weakness to make their

5 Richardson and Snellgrove, p. 198.
6 Ibid. p. 218.
7 Avedon, p. 14; Goldstein, p. 44; Richard and Snellgrove, p. 227.
imperial connection ever more a fiction, they continued to hide behind it whenever it suited them. Thus they argued that they could have no direct dealings with the British, for this would displease their Chinese overlord.\(^8\)

The first half of the twentieth century would be a time in which Tibet resisted the imperial ambitions of a European power and finally yielded to the colonial ambitions of an Asian power. In 1904, Great Britain established ties with Tibet in the hopes of checking Russian expansion which threatened the northern boundaries of Britain's Indian realm. At this time, Sir Francis Younghusband and other prominent Britons described China's claim on Tibet as a "constitutional fiction"—only to witness the dispatch of a Manchu army to Tibet a few years later in 1910. The display of force compelled the Dalai Lama to flee to India. The Chinese established direct rule of Tibet from Peking for the first time in history. In the confusion of the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, however, the Tibetans eventually expelled the Chinese troops, and, once again, the Dalai Lama was the "Head of the State of Tibet." The period between 1907 and the fall of the Manchu dynasty was the only time that the Chinese tried to impose their authority on the Tibetans by force, and their attempt was bitterly resented. The new Chinese Republic still claimed to be overlord, but the Tibetans persistently and effectively rejected their claim.\(^9\)

During the Simla Conference of 1914, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama attempted to settle the already centuries-old "Tibetan question." Tibet and Britain signed the agreement, but China rejected the settlement—not based on the question of autonomy but on boundary disagreements. Nevertheless, Great Britain and Tibet approved an almost identical agreement, and the accompanying change of notes included the statement that "Tibet forms part of Chinese territory."\(^10\) Britain did not support independence for Tibet

---

\(^8\) Snellgrove, p. 232.

\(^9\) Ibid, p. 234.

\(^10\) USFR, 611.93B/2-251, dated 2 February 1951. Policy review paper on Tibet in which 1) the position of the United States with respect to the loss of Tibet's autonomy in internal affairs and 2) tactics to be used to implement that position are outlined.
but, rather, the Simla Position, the "symbolic subordination to China, with extensive autonomy under the watchful eye of Great Britain"\textsuperscript{11} The ensuing chaos in China over the next three decades--the years of the Republic and the warlords, civil war, World War II, and communist revolution--pushed the Tibetan question far from the thoughts of the politically powerful Chinese. From 1912 to 1951, Tibet enjoyed an uneasy autonomy, maintaining total control over its own internal and external affairs.

\textbf{THE INTRUSION OF REALITY}

Snippets alluding to the past and present "reality" of Tibet serve as wakeful moments in the midst of this long reverie. The point here is not to deconstruct cherished Western perceptions of Tibet in order to arrive at a truer representation of the "real" Tibet--something, incidentally, that Western travelers to Tibet in the first half of the twentieth century vigorously attempted.\textsuperscript{12} The more interesting issue and the one directly related to the major task of this study is why these realities were ignored, distorted, and sometimes even inverted.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Isolated on the Roof of the World}

Surrounded by the highest mountains in the world, occupying a position known as the "Roof of the World," and, at times, particularly in the nineteenth century, following a policy of isolation, Tibet, indeed, appeared remote and sequestered from the rest of the world, a hermetic society uninfluenced by the outside. Relatively speaking, that is, compared to Western contact with other Asian countries, this was true. However, Tibet had never really been entirely isolated. By the eighth century, Buddhism had been transferred almost totally from India to Tibet and, later with the transmission of Chinese

\textsuperscript{11} Goldstein, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{12} Bishop, p. 228.

\textsuperscript{13} Lopez, p. 43.
Buddhism from the east, would provide the basis for Tibetan culture, a foundation that persists to this day. As we've seen, by the twentieth century, a dynamic relationship between Tibet and China had existed for centuries while both Indian and Chinese culture continued to influence Tibet deeply in modern times.

By the 1940s the fourteenth Dalai Lama (b. 1935) had his own telephone and received regular news reports from the British Resident in Sikkim. A stroll through the bazaar in the Barkhor, the commercial center of Lhasa ringing the most holy of temples, the Jokhang, revealed "Elizabeth Arden specialties. . . American corned beef. . . English whiskey. . . American overshoes, dating from the last war. . . displayed between joints of Yak's meat and chunks of butter." One could "order, too, sewing-machines, radio sets and gramophones and hunt up Bing Crosby's latest records for your next party." In addition, the Forbidden City received newspapers from all over the world via India, and even a few Tibetans subscribed to Life magazine. Tibet, then, was hardly the uncorrupted and uncontaminated Shangri-la of James Hilton's Lost Horizon.

Tibet as Utopia

The images of Tibet as a country free from conflict, ruled by a benevolent Dalai Lama, his people devoted to the dharma, Tibet as a successful fusion of religion and politics, prevailed in the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, this pre-1950 myth finds wide acceptance today, particularly in the United States. To be sure, Tibet considered itself a religious state; Tibetan Buddhism served as the basis of its national identity since the Gelugpa sect of the Dalai Lamas defeated the Karmapas, the most powerful of the Red Hat sects in 1642. The victorious 5th Dalai Lama (1617-1682) thus launched a

---

15 Bishop, p. 192.
17 The 5th Dalai Lama was a Gelugpa-sect incarnate lama. (The Tibetan practice of recognizing incarnations began
precedent to create a perfect environment for the practice of Tibetan Buddhism in general
and for the Gelugpa sect in particular.18 It is true that religion was a homogenous force in
Tibetan politics in one sense, but according to Melvyn Goldstein in *A History of Modern
Tibet, 1913-1951,* it was also a

\[ \ldots \] fragmenting and conflicting force. Competition among the various reli-
gious entities to increase their influence and prestige and lack of consen-
sus regarding which policies were in the interests of religion plagued 20th
century Tibetan history. The mass monk ideology and the annual cycle of
prayer festivals \ldots made them advocates of the serf-estate economic sys-
tem and thus extremely conservative. As Tibet attempted to adapt to the
rapid changes of the 20th century, religion and monasteries played a major
role in thwarting progress.19

Thus traditional Tibet, like any complex society, had great inequalities. Even high placed
and respected Tibetans commented on these disparities. Dhardo Rimpoche, an incarnate
lama and member of the Tibetan Gelug hierarchy living in Kalimpong in the 1950s,
affirmed that exploitation, oppression, and a feudal system existed in Tibet--claims that
Chinese Communists used to justify their invasion of Tibet.20

Finally, it is interesting to comment briefly on Asian perceptions of Tibet.
Westerners, such as Marco Pallis and Heinrich Harrer, generalized that Tibetans "were
some of the happiest people on the face of the earth"21 and possessed "perfect
courtesy."22 On the other hand, Indians in Kalimpong, perhaps more familiar with the
traders and muleteers in town, stereotyped them in a very different way. To them,
Tibetans were "crude and rough and unhygienic."23 The civil surgeon in Kalimpong, a

---

18 Ibid. p. 37
20 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/13/94.
22 Harrer, p. 217.
23 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/1/94.
THE TIBETAN QUESTION

Nepalese man named Dr. Singh, claimed that he averaged two stabbing cases by Tibetans every week. Tibetans also have a reputation as heavy drinkers. These observations paint a picture of Tibetans that is hardly flattering, not to mention romantic.

ON THE BRINK OF A COLD WAR

In the Asian arena of the Cold War, trouble brewed for the champions of democracy and capitalism. Chiang Kai-shek's total military defeat by Mao Tse-tung in October of 1949 was followed by the creation of the world's largest communist regime, one ostensibly aligned with Moscow. The following summer conflict broke out in Korea as North Korean soldiers crossed the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea; China joined the forces of the North in October of 1950, creating panic and confusion in the United Nations.

In the years just prior to these events, the late 1940s, China again threatened to squelch Tibetan independence. To create awareness of the right answer to the "Tibetan question," Radio Lhasa broadcast its views in Tibetan, Chinese, and English every day. In 1948, Tibet sent out its first international mission. Outwardly, its purpose in visiting such countries as the United States and Great Britain was to "lift Tibetan trade from the low level to which it has slumped in recent years and to establish direct trade relations with countries which Tibet has conducted its largest export-import trade." The Tibetans who organized the two-year mission, however, saw it as an excellent opportunity to open formal relations with other nations of the world and thus demonstrate Tibet's independent status. Liberal officials and lamas in Tibet carefully selected the members of the mission

24 Ibid.
for their culture and progressive ideas to prove to the world that the mysterious and exotic "Land of the Snows" was indeed a civilized country.²⁸

By the spring of 1949, imminent communist victory in China loomed menacingly for Tibet. It was for this reason that the Tibetan government granted unprecedented permission to two Americans, a father and a son, to visit the "Forbidden City." Lowell Thomas, Sr. and his son, Lowell Thomas, Jr., trekked from Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, to Lhasa. According to the younger Thomas, their expedition was "decidedly not a government mission, but we had every intention of openly informing the American people of whatever we could learn about the growing crisis with which Tibet was confronted--and with Tibet, the nations of the free world."²⁹ Indeed, the Thomases undertook to make a world-wide campaign in favor of Tibetan independence. Radio broadcasts from the "Roof of the World"--broadcasts that included both travelogue, everything from descriptions of the mountains and wildflowers to caravans they met along the way, and background information on Tibetan history--familiarized Americans with the relatively unknown country and engendered sympathy and moral support.³⁰ In addition, they appealed for aid in the highest echelons of the U.S. government. In the long run, however, even this positive publicity failed to provide any tangible means for thwarting the advance of the Chinese Communists.

When the British withdrew from India in 1947, the Tibetans were assured that all the former British rights and obligations would be communicated to the new government of India and that the British would continue to take a friendly interest in their welfare.³¹ But, this was not to be. After the communist victory in China, Mao Tse-tung began to consolidate his power in areas where scattered resistance to the Chinese Communist Party

²⁸ Harrer, p. 241.
²⁹ Lowell Thomas, Jr., Out of This World to Forbidden Tibet, p. 38.
³⁰ Lowell Thomas, Jr., interview, 7/2/94.
³¹ Richardson and Snellgrove, A Cultural History of Tibet, p. 266.
(CCP) still prevailed and took steps to bring Tibet and Taiwan back into the fold of the "motherland." On May 22, 1950, Radio Peking announced to the Tibetan government and people that the "peaceful liberation of Tibet" had occurred. According to the broadcast, Tibet was a part of China, and Tibetans could neither stop the People's Liberation Army (PLA) nor count on receiving outside aid from any of the imperialist countries, namely America or Britain. In order to save the Tibetan people from unnecessary losses, the Chinese Communists encouraged Tibet to send representatives to Peking to begin peace negotiations.

The Indian government did not jump to the aid of Tibet in the face of this aggressive Chinese posturing. Rather, in the excitement of its newly won independence from imperial rule, India hastened to declare the Chinese as long lost brothers, who like them had suffered cruelly in the past from Western encroachments. The myth of the two thousand years of Sino-Indian friendship was suddenly created. Great Britain, while still interested in Tibet maintaining its autonomy, held the Tibetan problem to be almost solely India's concern. The United States, while ostensibly interested in keeping communism at bay--at least in Europe--hesitated to defy both India and Great Britain.

In October of 1950, Chinese troops entered both South Korea and Tibet. Undetected by U.S. intelligence, the PLA crossed secretly into North Korea and began to aid the North Korean Communists. Within a month, the Chinese had mounted a complete offensive against the South Korean and UN units. To the west, the PLA attacked the eastern frontier of Tibet in six places simultaneously. Tibet appealed to the United Nations but was rejected. Great Britain and India continued to look the other way, while the United States led by Loy Henderson, the American ambassador to Delhi, lobbied for moral support of Tibet. Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama and his entourage had escaped to

32 Goldstein, p. 679.
33 U.S. Foreign Relations, Volume IX, p. 1091, 893.00 Tibet/12-1249, telegram from the Charge in the United Kingdom to the U.S. Secretary of State, dated 12 December 1949.
34 Loy Henderson was a colleague of George Kennan who wrote X-Article in 1947, a document which helped to
Yatung in Tibet, close to the Indian border, where they remained for several months—in
stalemated indecision over the political future of their country. By the spring of 1951,
developments in Korea demonstrated alarming evidence of China's military power. In its
efforts to thwart the advance of the Chinese in yet another country, the United States
attempted to establish closer communications with Tibet and moved in the direction of
offering it more substantial support.
THE KALIMPONG CONNECTION

Arguably one of the most beautifully situated places in the world, Kalimpong, a small hillside town, straddles the crest of a ridge 4000 feet high. Facing the range of awe-inspiring eastern Himalayas, which separate India from Tibet and Bhutan, the town of Kalimpong consists of one long main street which loops down one hillside into a little valley and rises up another hillside in the direction of Gangtok in Sikkim and Yatung in Tibet. It is 390 miles from the former Asian capital of the British empire, Calcutta, and but a stone's throw from the "Land of the Snows," that is, Tibet.

The Tibetans called Kalimpong "Kalonphug," the "Cave of the Ministers," supposedly because the ministers of the neighboring kingdom of Sikkim, once held meetings there in a cave. The name, however, seems to have originated from the language of the Lepchas, the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim and may have actually meant the "Governor's Fortress." At one time, the area around Kalimpong belonged to Bhutan, but, in 1864, defeat by British troops forced the tiny Himalayan kingdom to relinquish its claim to this territory. After the withdrawal of the British from India in 1947, Kalimpong officially became a part of India, while Sikkim remained a protectorate until 1975. During the heyday of the British raj, Kalimpong and its neighbor, the more bustling and popular town of Darjeeling, functioned as two of the many hill-stations in India, peaceful and cool retreats from the oppressive summer heat of the plains. The famous Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, spent his summers here and started Chitrabanu, a home for destitute women. In addition to summer refuge, Kalimpong served as the administrative

---

center for a considerable expanse of Indian territory bordering Sikkim and Bhutan.2

When the weather is clear, particularly after the monsoons, the unleashing of torrential rains which last from May through mid-August, the beautiful mountain called Kanchenjunga dominates the scenery of Kalimpong. At an altitude of over 28,000 feet, it is the third highest peak in the world; its majesty and immensity have inspired humans for centuries. To both the Lepchas and Tibetans, Kanchenjunga is a holy mountain. The Lepchas call it "Konglo Chu," the "Highest Veil of the Ice." The Tibetans have named it "the Five Treasures of the Eternal Snow." They believe that the Tibetan god of wealth made it his residence and deposited five kinds of riches on its five peaks--gold, silver, precious stones, grain, and sacred books.3 Indeed, the summit of Kanchenjunga sparkles like a cornucopia of precious metals and rare gems and eclipses in both height and grandeur the other peaks of the eastern Himalayas visible from Kalimpong.

For centuries the Himalayas have engaged the imagination of Asians and Westerners alike. These peaks have played a key role in the religious and cultural life of Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. The Romantic movement created a sensibility which encouraged Westerners to find solace and inspiration in the expansiveness and magnificence of the world's highest peaks. Inspiration led to aspiration to conquer the Himalayas when mountain climbing became sport in the late 1800s. Although incomprehensible to the indigenous Asian people who generally viewed mountain-climbing as a dangerous and foolhardy pursuit, not to mention a violation of the sacredness of the mountain, to Westerners, the reason "because it was there" became the acceptable explanation for such an ambition.

Kalimpong's proximity to Tibet has resulted in an association between the two regions that had been in place decades prior to the period of this study, the mid-twentieth century. In fact, the commercial importance of Kalimpong is linked to its position as a

2 Ibid. p. 65.
3 Ibid, p. 29.
KANCHENJUNGA, CARAVANS, AND YAK WOOL

terminus of the Lhasa-India trade route. The most important town on the Indo-Tibetan frontier, it was the gateway to Central Asia and the starting point of the busy trade road to the two formerly closed kingdoms of the Himalayas, Nepal and Sikkim, and the closed kingdom of Bhutan, the last remaining traditional society in Asia. Thousands of mules and ponies came and went, carrying the chief exports of Tibet, wool and musk, to India and transporting in exchange cotton, kerosene, sugar, British hats–especially the trilby–manufactured goods such as hardware, soap, and matches, as well as silk and other Chinese products, back across the mighty Himalayas. Just a few years after the Communist Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, however, spades, pickaxes and shovels for the communist construction of a network of road across the Land of the Snows would replace the former trade products.

Gazing toward the hillside below Cho-la, one of the highest and most difficult passes leading from Sikkim to Tibet, one can discern the great caravan route that linked Central Asia with India. The caravan road precariously leads to the two most important passes in the Sikkimese Himalayas, Natu-la and Jelep-la, both measuring over 14,500 feet. Trudging across these passes, the traveler sets foot in the Chumbi Valley, called by the Tibetans Tromo, the "Land of the Wheat," a piece of Tibetan territory wedged between Sikkim to the west and Bhutan to the east. The present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b.1935), lived there in the small village of Yatung for a brief period of time in 1951, while ruminating over the future of his country in the face of the ever-encroaching communist Chinese. A small but steady stream of Tibetans–officials who relayed information about the political fate of their country and refugees who sought what they believed to be temporary asylum in India–trekked the dusty trail from Yatung to Kalimpong during this time. After the second Chinese invasion of Lhasa in 1959, Tibetans, a total of 80,000

4 Nebesky, p. 65.
5 Pallis, Peaks and Lamas, p. 114; Snellgrove and Richardson, A Cultural History of Tibet, p. 235.
6 Nebesky, p. 254.
during the next two years, fled along this path and others. The trail wanders through the Chumbi Valley and rises again. Here, one reaches the great Tibetan plateau at Phari Dzong, the "Hog-Mountain Fortress." If all goes well, two weeks, possibly less, on this well-traveled route leads the weary merchant, traveler, or pilgrim to the Holy City of Lhasa.

**AT MID-CENTURY**

In the 1950s, Kalimpong supported a population of approximately 30,000 inhabitants, which fluctuated according to the rhythms of trade, specifically the Tibetan wool trade. It was home to a colorful array of transients and residents, both Asian and, to a much lesser degree, Western. During his visit to Kalimpong in May 1951, Fraser Wilkins, First Secretary of the United States Embassy in Delhi, reported that the majority of the community included "agriculturists, small shopkeepers, employees of the wool houses and travelling Tibetans" with "interests . . . almost entirely confined to Kalimpong and the immediate vicinity."^8

**An Ethnographic Heaven**

To René von Nebesky-Wojkowitz, an Austrian anthropologist who spent the years 1950 to 1953 in Kalimpong and the surrounding area observing the peoples of the Himalayas, Kalimpong represented an ethnographic heaven. He claimed that "on market days, its streets are filled with a motley throng of purchasers and onlookers representing practically all peoples living in the Himalayas and adjacent territories."^9 This assortment included Lepchas, the diminutive, indigenous natives of Sikkim; swarthy Nepalese coolies

---

^7 Ibid. pp. 60-61.

^8 Memorandum describing Kalimpong and its residents as well as important developments regarding Tibet, dated 12 May 1951, enclosed (number 1) with USFR, 611.93B/5-2451, letter from Fraser Wilkins, U.S. Embassy in India, to the U.S. Department of State, dated 24 May 1951.

^9 Nebesky, p. 66.
whose developed bodies and leathery bare feet reflected a life of carrying goods in cone-shaped baskets on their backs; Newar silversmiths "wearing loose-fitting white jodhpurs and double-breasted Nepalese shirts;" wealthy Marwari merchants with light brown skin and narrow eyes who hailed from Jodhpur in northwestern India; merchants and artisans of Chinese descent; Bhutanese, Bengalis, and a variety of other Himalayan people including Gurkhas, Tamangs, Limbus, Mangars, and Chetris. Tibetans living and working in Kalimpong hailed from all over the "Roof of the World" and spanned the entrenched class system as well. This colorful collection included the crusty and crude muleteers whose livelihood depended on transporting yak wool over the rugged mountain passes; the fierce, heroic-looking inhabitants of Kham—the Khambas—easily identified by long, black braids held in place by twisted strands of red yarn and swords swinging from their belts; fancily dressed, aloof aristocrats with earring dangling; and maroon-robed lamas. According to Nebesky, inhabitants of Kalimpong celebrated the New Year no fewer than seven times in a year.

The Social Elite of Kalimpong

While most inhabitants of Kalimpong earned their daily bread laboring in its streets and surrounding fields or sweating along the caravan route, a minority of individuals dwelled in an entirely different realm. The Asian social elite lived in relative opulence in an area of town far removed from unsavory sections such as Tenth Mile, home of Tibetan commerce and the "red light" district, and Tobkhana, a basic shelter for the poorest of the poor. In addition to Tibetan aristocrats and government officials, for example, Tsepon Shakabpa, one of the members of the Tibetan Trade Mission in 1948 and Treasurer of

10 Ibid. p. 66; Sangharakshita, Facing Mount Kanchenjunga, pp. 14-16.
11 The religious and cultural traditions of these groups specify a different date for the New Year. For example, the Tibetans celebrate the New Year in February while the Marwaris celebrate it in April.
12 Nebesky, p. 74.
Tibet, individuals from the Bhutanese and Sikkimese ruling families and Indian Government officials lived in Kalimpong. Some of the more illustrious and interesting included Princess Pema Tsedun, the eldest daughter of the Maharaja of Sikkim; Prince K.M. Latthakin, known in Kalimpong as the Burma Raja, the nephew of King Thibaw, the last king of Burma, and his wife, the "Burmese Princess," the second daughter of King Thibaw and the infamous Queen Supalayat who was known as the "Cobra Woman," Raja S.T. Dorji, the Bhutan trade agent in Kalimpong, and his wife Rani Chuni, the sister of the Maharaja of Sikkim.

A Mélange of Westerners

Although a minority, the miscellaneous and eclectic mix of Westerners attracted to Kalimpong rivaled the local peoples in the diversity of their interests, backgrounds, and personalities. Some individuals stayed for months or years at a time while others stayed only for a few days or weeks. Such temporary visitors included weary travelers unintentionally straying from the beaten tourist track of India, journalists, often ill-informed, reporting on the situation in Tibet, friends of the permanent Western community, and American State Department officials clandestinely gleaning valuable information for Washington D.C. The seasonal visitors generally stayed at the Himalayan Hotel, the only Western-style hotel in Kalimpong. It belonged to David MacDonald, the son of a Scot and Tibetan woman; he had served as the British Trade Agent at Yatung from 1905 to 1925. Annie Perry, known as Annie-la to locals and guests alike, ran the hotel for her elderly and roguish father during the 1950s. Depending on the source, the Himalayan Hotel was either the center of much intrigue and shady transactions.

13 Other prominent Tibetans resident in Kalimpong at this time included Yangpel Pangdatshang, the Tibetan Trade Agent at Yatung and special representative of the Tibetan government, and Drasa Liushar, one of the two Tibetan Foreign Secretaries.
14 Sangharakshita, p. 30.
15 Ibid. p. 133.
The specific interests and goals of the permanent Western residents of Kalimpong varied. Yet, a significant number held in common an interest in Tibet. Considering the difficulties of gaining permission to enter Tibet and, later, the Chinese invasion in the autumn of 1950, Kalimpong was the next best thing to being in Tibet. Kalimpong's proximity to Tibet and its Tibetan population, ranging from muleteers to monks and lamas to important government officials, provided ample means for pursuing the quest for the myth of Tibet—while technically in India.

Some Westerners believed fervently and, often unyieldingly, that their mission in life was to spread God's word among the heathen masses. Kalimpong with its eclectic collection of non-Christian inhabitants, particularly the Tibetans, beckoned promisingly as extremely fertile ground for doing "God's work." A few Westerners, such as the acclaimed author of *Peaks and Lamas* [1933], Marco Pallis, fanned the flames of a torrid love affair with Tibet, its culture and religion. Still others, such as George Roerich, the Russian Tibetologist; René Nebesky, the Austrian anthropologist; Joseph Rock, the cantankerous American with a passion for the people and the flora and fauna of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands; and Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, an anthropologist with an interest in languages and polyandry, professed a scholarly interest in Tibetan and Himalayan languages, history, and religions. Adventurers, like the Austrian Heinrich Harrer, who began writing his famous book *Seven Years in Tibet* while staying at the Himalayan Hotel, and the Scottish missionary George Patterson, discovered in Tibet a playground of rugged and intrepid adventure. The political drama of Tibet in the 1950s allowed each to continue to indulge in real-life fantasies. A few, scholars, such as the Englishman R.K. Spriggs, a lecturer on Tibet at the London School of Oriental and

---

16 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/19/94.
17 Nebesky, pp. 80-81, 90.
African Studies, adventurers, and Theosophists in search of the mahatmas, those wizened, wise adepts immortalized by the eccentric Madame Blavatsky, journeyed to Kalimpong and waited—with the hopes that officials in Lhasa would grant them permission to visit the "Forbidden City," that is, Lhasa, or other areas in Tibet.

One important Western resident whose primary reason for being in Kalimpong did not focus on Tibet was Sangharakshita. From 1950 to 1964 he lived in the Himalayan town facing Mount Kanchenjunga with the purpose "to work for the good of Buddhism." Born in London and christened Dennis Lingwood, he was ordained in India as a Theravadin monk in 1949. Prior to his ordination, following the centuries-old Indian Buddhist tradition, he had wandered without possessions and financial means from the southern tip of India to the birthplace of the Buddha in northern India. In Kalimpong, he established a Buddhist movement called the Young Men's Buddhist Association (Y.M.B.A.) and, among a variety of other activities, published a monthly magazine called Stepping-Stones which focused on Buddhism in the area. It included a number of famous contributors, both Western and Asian, and subscribers worldwide.

Although too young, only 25 when he first arrived in Kalimpong at mid-century, and too unacquainted with Tibet to be included in this generation of Tibet lovers, Sangharakshita certainly had a fondness for Tibet. Indeed, one of his poems entitled "Messengers from Tibet" written not long after his arrival in Kalimpong captures both the mundane trade matters that connected Kalimpong with Tibet and Sangharakshita's early romantic image of Tibet. At the beginning of the poem, he refers to the creatures of the

---

18 FO371/84470, letter from the Commonwealth Relations Office in London to the United Kingdom High Commissioner in India regarding visitors to Tibet, dated 27 March 1950.
19 Sangharakshita, Facing Mount Kanchenjunga, p. 7.
20 In two personal interviews and his own writing, Sangharakshita contributed crucial narrative to this story—a sense of the general flavor of Kalimpong in the 1950s and details about some of the individuals in the study.
21 In my second interview with Sangharakshita (5/19/94), I asked him whether his attitude toward Tibet at this time bordered on romanticization. He responded: "I think only to a very limited extent, because, in some ways, since I had some contact with some quite important Tibetan lamas, I was fortunate in the sense that I had contact with them without their trappings and before they acquired any trappings again. They came out just as refugees and I just had quite straightforward contact with them. So, I think only perhaps in the very beginning and perhaps a bit in
caravan route: "Whence come these asses, brazen-bellied, That jingle down the dusty lane
with big brown bales of tufty wool--A hundred in a single train?" The second to the last
stanza echoes the romantic description of and longing for Tibet, by now so familiar: "Oh
land of turquoise, land of gold, Land of the whispered, mystic lore, Land of the Buddha,
land unknown, Were you my land in days of yore?"

Political Activity and Intrigue in Kalimpong

The spring and summer of 1951 was a politically active time in Kalimpong.
During those crucial months, the Dalai Lama and his government in Yatung deliberated
over whether to honor or publicly disavow the unauthorized signing of the Seventeen
Point Agreement in Peking. Its proximity to Tibet and the Dalai Lama made Kalimpong
an obvious magnet for Chinese, Tibetans, and Westerners interested in clarifying--or
contributing to--the intrigue rampant at this time. To gain a clearer understanding of the
status of Tibetan resistance to the Communist Chinese, U.S. State Department officials
arranged secret contacts and communication with representatives of the Tibetan
government, and, at the request of Shakabpa and other important Tibetans set up informal
U.S. representation there. Meanwhile high Tibetan officials and Communist Chinese
spies and government officials lived side by side, and Westerners associated with
Kalimpong were incited to action or inspired to publicly comment on the subjugation of
Tibet.

connection with the Dalai Lama himself did I have any sort of romantic ideas or feelings about Tibet."

22 Sangharakshita, Conquering New Worlds, Selected Poems of Sangharakshita (Glasgow: Windhorse

23 Memorandum of a conversation focusing on the Tibetan request for U.S. assistance. Tsepon Shakabpa, Jigme
Tsering, and Fraser Wilkins were present, dated 8 June 1951, enclosed (number 4) with USFR, 611.93B/6-1451,
despatch 3030, letter from Lloyd Steere, U.S. Embassy in India, to the U.S. Department of State, dated 14 June 1951.
CONDUIT OF MISPERCEPTIONS: KALIMPONG AS "THE LOCAL BAR"

The beginning of the euphemistically termed "peaceful liberation of Tibet," the dramatic and unexpected Chinese invasion of eastern Tibet in October 1950, not only compelled Tibetans to flee from Lhasa to Kalimpong; it attracted newspaper correspondents and journalists, scholars, and tourists from all over the world to this small Himalayan town facing Mount Kanchenjunga.24

By November, Tibet and Korea had hit international headlines. René Nebesky, the Austrian anthropologist, described the activity in Kalimpong during the remaining days of 1950:

The squad of reporters hurry through the streets of Kalimpong festooned with cameras, question every new arrival from Tibet--down to the last muleteer--with the aid of interpreters. In the afternoon, they queue up outside the telegraph office, whose employees have never had so much to do in all their lives.25

In the evening, the correspondents gathered with the local Europeans at the Himalayan Hotel--"small, full of Tibetan atmosphere, primitive but comfortable"--drinking "mild millet beer which Annie-la set[s] before [them] in tall bamboo receptacles.27 Members of the Tibetan aristocracy also found accommodation at the Himalayan Hotel.

Sangharakshita noted that the MacDonald clan, proprietors of the inn, did not have a good reputation among the local people in Kalimpong, for all sorts of reasons.28 In spite of this, journalists, in particular, those who were just there for a short time, tended to rely on the MacDonald's information.29 It is interesting to note that Fraser Wilkins, the

24 Nebesky, Where the Gods Are Mountains, p. 93.
25 Ibid. p. 90.
26 Memorandum describing Kalimpong, dated 12 May 1951, enclosed (number 1) with USFR, 611.93B/5-2451, letter from Fraser Wilkins, U.S. Embassy in India, to the U.S. Department of State, dated 24 May 1951.
27 Nebesky, p. 94.
28 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/13/94.
29 Annie-la's information was not always reliable. For example, in Enclosure No. 5 to Despatch 2891, dated May 24, 1951, Fraser Wilkins noted that, in a meeting on May 12, 1951, Annie-la stated that she had heard that the Dalai Lama was leaving Yatung for Lhasa or India. The Dalai Lama did not leave Yatung for Lhasa until July 21.
representative from the U.S. Embassy in Delhi, stayed at the Himalayan Hotel during his visits to Kalimpong in the spring of 1951.

According to George Patterson, a Scottish missionary who had spent two years in eastern Tibet, misrepresentation of Tibet by the press in Kalimpong was rampant. Very few of the Tibetans spoke English, and none of the journalists could speak Tibetan. As a result, the reporters were forced to gather "facts" in the bazaar from muleteers and others, often paid for their services, through bilingual locals. Patterson described the results as "imaginative reporting." Journalists depicted Tibet as

... a combination of James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, Lobsang Rampa's *The Third Eye*, and Harrer's *Seven Years in Tibet*—simple prayer-muttering people, with a Gilbert-and-Sullivan army, armed with antique, muzzle-loading rifles, and a superstitious priesthood, fleeing in terror before the disciplined formations of the Chinese Army. One report even had it that the Dalai Lama fled because of a superstitious prognostication involving some balls of tsamba.30

Even reputable publications such as the *Hindustan Standard* of Calcutta, a well-known English language newspaper, did not always rely on facts when reporting about the "Land of the Snows." One of its reporters stayed at the Himalayan Hotel and had no local contacts or sources. In spite of this, he regularly wrote reports, describing the advance of the Chinese army from eastern Tibet to Lhasa, stage by stage. Kalimpong residents among others, followed the progress of the army with "bated breath."31 Robert Ford, a British radio operator working for the Tibetan government in Chamdo—captured by the Chinese Communists after the 1950 invasion and jailed for five years in Chungking—described the appalling lack of veracity in reports regarding Tibet at this time:

As there had been no Press correspondents in Tibet, all the reports were based on rumors picked up in Kalimpong. Nearly all of them seemed to have been made up there. I read fantastic stories, including one that credited me with having taken command of the frontier defenses... But I was more depressed to read how the Tibetan resistance was belittled. The favorite story was that the Chinese let off some fireworks and the Tibetan troops

31 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/13/94.
ran away.\textsuperscript{32}

By no means were misperceptions and misrepresentations of Tibet limited to Kalimpong but were perhaps concentrated here at this time due to its unique location and the convergence of Tibetan refugees and Westerners interested in Tibet.

A MICROCOSM OF
WESTERN HOPES AND FANTASIES

A COLLAGE OF WESTERNERS

Marco Pallis, an Englishman. A disciple of René Guénon, the French Orientalist who initiated the Traditionalist movement in the West. Accomplished linguist. Independently wealthy and involved with the revival of pre-baroque and baroque music in Britain during the 1930s.¹

Heinrich Harrer, an Austrian. A member of the 1936 Austrian Olympic ski team and a mountaineer. Escapee of a British prison camp in Dehra Dun, India, and characterized as a "better type of Nazi" by one prominent English expatriate.²

George Patterson, a Scot. Intrepid traveler. A ruggedly individualistic and unorthodox Christian missionary who considered it his task--divinely revealed--to warn India and the West of the advancing Chinese Communists in Asia.

Lama Anagarika Govinda, a German. A reclusive mystic and artist who believed himself to be the reincarnation of the German Romantic poet-philosopher Novalis.³ An influential Western interpreter of Buddhism, who died among American devotees in Marin county, California.

George Roerich, a Russian. A scholar and Theosophical Buddhist. The son of the famous Russian artist and explorer, Nicholas Roerich, and spiritual medium, Helena Ivanovna Shaposhnikoff.

¹ Sangharakshita, interview, 5/13/94.
² As described by Marco Pallis in Sangharakshita, Facing Mount Kanchenjunga, p. 179.
³ See page 8 for more information on Novalis. Incidentally, Novalis imagined the Garden of Eden to be hidden away somewhere in the Himalayas.
An unlikely coalition, indeed. Travelers and expatriates, these men are connected not by nationality, religious beliefs, or social class but spatiotemporally—Kalimpong in the early 1950s—and by the myth of Tibet, the most profound force in their lives. Clearly, the fascination with Tibet is not a passing curiosity of Western cultural history. In Kalimpong, the quest for the myth was acted out by a generation of Tibet lovers who could no longer hope to live, work, or travel in Tibet. For this microcosm of Europe, Tibet, the Tibet that each individual conceived, provided meaning and offered hope—at a time when peace and security were in the balance. The cold war that followed in the wake of the unprecedented destruction of World War II had intensified uncertainties and fears. A more devastating potential holocaust, world-wide nuclear annihilation, now loomed menacingly.

**Tradition and Tibetan Buddhism: Marco Pallis and Lama Anagarika Govinda**

**Marco Pallis**

But there was something else which... drew my gaze even more than the icy spire. To the left of it, through a distant gap in the mountains, we could just make out lines of purple rolling hills, that seemed to belong to another world, a world of austere calm... It was a corner of Tibet. My eyes rested on it with an intensity of longing.\(^4\)

For Marco Pallis, as with the nineteenth century Romantic lovers of Tibet, it began with peaks. In his popular book, *Peaks and Lamas* (1933), he described his travels in northern India, where, in the course of scaling peaks, he met Tibetan Buddhists and lamas. These encounters in the rarefied air of the Tibetan Plateau transformed his interest in physical activity and geography into a passion for exploring the map of human existence and meaning through Tibetan Buddhism. As he expressed it, "At the outset of my story, I tried to climb peaks in a bodily sense; but in the end I discovered the Lama who beckoned me toward immaterial heights."\(^5\) Known in Kalimpong by the Tibetan name Thubden Tendzin, Pallis practiced Tibetan Buddhism and was respected and liked among the lamas

---


\(^5\) Ibid. p. 423.
for his commitment to the dharma, his fluency in the Tibetan language, and his knowledge of Tibetan manners and customs.  

A true Renaissance man—mountain climber, musician, linguist, and writer--Marco Pallis was deeply influenced by Réne Guénon (1886-1951), the famous French Orientalist, who viewed the revival of tradition in the modern world as paramount. For Guénon, tradition referred to "truths rooted in ultimate reality and the spiritual world, and to the ramifications, applications, and historical unfolding of these truths, which are made available to people through the revelation that lies at the heart of all religions." Guénon and Pallis viewed the crisis in the modern world as emanating from a decline in spiritual values which they attributed to the lack of respect for tradition. Pallis described the tragedy in the following passage:

My basic thesis is that between any traditional body of custom and that of any anti-traditional civilization like ours--the only one of its kind that history has known--there is no real equivalence. Modern occidentalism is threatening to flatten out the whole world and mould it to a single, rather dull pattern, throwing away all that diversity whereby man has enriched himself through the centuries.

For Pallis, Tibet was the last remaining traditional society, a tapestry of cultural expression, woven over the centuries. Modern society threatened to replace this rich tapestry with a colorless billboard.

Lama Anagarika Govinda

Some inexplicable force seemed to keep me back, and the longer I stayed on in this magic world in which I had dropped by a strange concatenation of circumstances, the more I felt that a hitherto unknown form of reality was revealed to me and that I was on the threshold of a new life.

Lama Govinda

During the first years of the Great War, the teenager Ernst Lothar Hoffman

---

6 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/13/94; Facing Mount Kanchenjunga, p. 190.
8 Pallis, p. 228.
converted to Buddhism—and served in the German army. In 1928 he sailed to Ceylon and immersed himself in what he considered to be the only authentic teaching of the Buddha—the Theravadin tradition. There, he became an *anagarika*, a homeless layman, rather than a monk. Govinda—the name given to him by a German Theravadin monk living in Ceylon, Anthon Gueth—was to get his first taste of Tibetan Buddhism in the hill station of Darjeeling where he looked forward to the "opportunity to uphold the purity of the Buddha's teaching, as preserved in Ceylon, and to spread its message in a country where the Buddha-Dharma had degenerated into a system of demon-worship and weird beliefs"—an attitude toward Tibetan Buddhism shared by many. As it turned out, however, his "system of demon-worship and weird beliefs" was to transform his life.

Govinda soon discovered that the vivid and elaborate symbolism of Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan landscape engaged his artistic and romantic spirit in a way that the austere and strict Theravada could not. Eventually, he settled in the eastern Himalayas in Ghoom, close to Kalimpong. After World War II broke out, Govinda, who held a British-Indian passport, was arrested and moved to a permanent internment camp in Premnagar near Dehra Dun. There, he "retreated into his own studies and with a few companions remained aloof from the general politicking and arguing. . ." Coincidentally, Heinrich Harrer, another character in this collage with a very different philosophy of life, spent time at Premnagar.

In 1948, Govinda and his wife, Li Gotami, a former student at the Rabindranath Tagore's university at Shantiniketan in Bengal, made a pilgrimage to western Tibet to the lost city of Tsaparang where they spent weeks in the extreme cold sketching and tracing the priceless works of art the long-deserted temples of the ruins contained. His popular

---

11 Batchelor, p. 313.
The Way of the White Clouds describes these travels and Govinda's inner journey. In the 1950s, the couple made frequent trips to the caravan town of Kalimpong to visit their friend, Sangharakshita. Sangharakshita considered the "romantic" lama who dressed in elaborate silk brocade robes a "kindred spirit."14

Mountaineering, Missions, and Adventure: Heinrich Harrer and George Patterson

George Patterson

My destiny in His purpose was linked with this land of Tibet with its feuding, fascinating people, its limitless distances and unscalable peaks, its bewildering mixture of fighting priests, feudal politics, and myth-entangled history.15

George Patterson

In prayer, God revealed to the medical missionary George Patterson that not only had he sent him to Tibet and other countries of Asia to "communicate to those who have never heard the knowledge you have learned of me." Indeed, his work had just begun:

Not only Kham or Tibet or Central Asia but the whole world must know that I am still God of Abraham and of Moses... the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ... You are the only person with the knowledge of Chinese Communist plans to take over Tibet and other countries of Asia. No one knows and one even suspects that China is making for India...16

Patterson and Geoffrey Bullock, another aspiring Plymouth Brethren missionary, had joined forces and traveled to eastern Tibet via China in March 1947. During the next two years, they learned the Kham dialect of the Tibetan language and worked throughout eastern Tibet, home of the fierce and warring Khambas. The communist advance eventually led the missionaries deep into the mountains of Tibet to the remote valley of Kangting where they lived with two members of the Pangdatshang family.17 Finally, the

14 Sangharakshita, p. 270; Sangharakshita described Govinda in the second interview: "I think he was a pure romantic. But with definite philosophical underpinnings. He had a deep understanding of the underlying [Tibetan Buddhist] philosophy. But my impression was that he'd had very limited contact with Tibetans. Very limited indeed."
15 George Patterson, Tragic Destiny (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 27.
16 Ibid. p. 209.
17 FO1015/8, letter from the United Kingdom High Commissioner in India the Commonwealth Relations Office in London, dated 11 March 1950; George Patterson, Tibetan Journey (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p. 16.
imminent invasion by the Chinese of Tibet during the remaining months of 1949 and the dwindling supply of food and medicine compelled Patterson to risk the dangers of the perilous overland route in order to arrange the transport of supplies to Tibet from India.\(^{18}\) Patterson succeeded in traversing the route that no other white man had traveled in its entirety but was not destined to return to Kham.\(^{19}\) Within months of his departure, the advancing Chinese Communists captured the unlucky Bullock and held him prisoner for three years.\(^{20}\) Patterson was based in Kalimpong over the next few years.

Patterson's devotion to God's word was clearly matched by his passion for adventure. On the morning of his departure in the sub-zero chill of the Tibetan morning, he mused over the impending journey to India:

> What did I want with the pursuits and trappings of civilization? None of them provided me with the latent, sustained excitement, the satisfying pleasure, the fascinating suspense of travel in unknown places, with no shaving, no washing, no bathing, no dressing, into the bargain!\(^{21}\)

In contrast to Pallis and Govinda, Patterson consistently denounced the Tibetan religion as a form of Buddhism which "became mixed up with earlier forms of black magic practices of shamanistic Bonism, and gradually became a . . . form[s] of aggressive demon-worship by which the poor Tibetan was put in constant fear of attacks by thousands of malignant devils both in this life" and the next.\(^{22}\) Patterson had no respect for Tibetan lamas and monks whose "presence and practice repels." Yet, he was enamored with the "charm and virility" of the ordinary Tibetans and strongly identified

---

\(^{18}\) Ibid. p. 20.

\(^{19}\) Frank Bessac, an American Fulbright scholar in Mongolia, also escaped from the advancing Chinese Communists. In May 1950, with the U.S. Vice-Consul General, Douglas S. Mackiernan, and three White Russians, Bessac left Xinjiang, China and journeyed to Tibet. In Tibet, Mackiernan and two of the White Russians were killed by Tibetan soldiers who had not received word to welcome the Americans. Currently, Bessac is a retired professor of anthropology at the University of Montana. For a complete account of the journey, see his article, "This Was the Perilous Trek to Tragedy," *Life*, November 13, 1950.

\(^{20}\) Patterson, *Tibetan Journey*, p. 231.

\(^{21}\) Ibid. p. 31.

\(^{22}\) Patterson, *Tragic Destiny*, p. 189; *Up and Down Asia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p. 93.
with the fierce and warrior-like Khambas of eastern Tibet.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{Heinrich Harrer}

I follow all that happens in Tibet with the deepest interest, for part of my being is indissolubly linked with that dear country. Wherever I live, I shall feel homesick for Tibet. I often think I can still hear the wild cries of geese and cranes and the beating of their wings as they fly over Lhasa in the clear cold moonlight.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Heinrich Harrer}

With swollen and blistered feet, clothed in ragged garments, his face tanned and leathery from exposure to the extremes of cold and heat, the Austrian Heinrich Harrer at long last beheld the imposing Potala, the landmark of Lhasa. Serendipity had led Harrer to the "Land of the Snows."

A superb skier and highly skilled mountain climber,\textsuperscript{25} Heinrich Harrer had long dreamed of tackling some of the highest mountains in the world, the Himalayas. In 1939, he traveled to Asia and participated in the first successful expedition to reach the 8000 meter summit of the Indian peak, Nanga Parbat.\textsuperscript{26} The price he paid was almost as high. While waiting for a ship in Karachi to take him back to Europe, World War II broke out, and Harrer was interned by the British in a prison camp in Premnagar near Dehra Dun, India. While he plotted and schemed his breakout, in the same camp, Lama Govinda worked on a multilingual (Tibetan, Sanskrit, Pali, and English) glossary of Buddhist terms and tutored a fellow Buddhist monk, Nyanaponika, in Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{27}

With mountaineering skills, stamina, and a bit of luck, Harrer and a compatriot, Peter Aufschnaiter, escaped from the camp in 1944. In a harrowing journey that lasted

\textsuperscript{23} Patterson, \textit{Tibetan Journey}, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{24} Heinrich Harrer, \textit{Seven Years in Tibet}, p. 314.

\textsuperscript{25} In 1938, Harrer and his friends, Fritz Kasparek, Anderl Heckmair, and Wiggerl Vorg, completed the first successful ascent of the treacherous North Wall of the Swiss peak, the Eiger.

\textsuperscript{26} In 1947, India gained independence from Great Britain. The northwestern and eastern portions of India became Pakistan. From that Nanga Parbat was a part of Pakistan. Harrer notes the effect of these majestic mountains in \textit{Seven Years in Tibet}, p. xv: "On this expedition to Nanga Parbat I succumbed to the magic of the Himalayas. The beauty of these gigantic mountains, the immensity of the lands on which they look down, the strangeness of the people of India—all these worked on my mind like a spell."

\textsuperscript{27} Winklder, \textit{A Thousand Journeys}, p. 56.
nearly two years, they walked all the way across the "lonely Trans-Himalaya range" to the "forbidden city," Lhasa. There, Harrer and Aufschnaiter remained for five years where they worked for the Tibetan government in various capacities--Aufschnaiter as an engineer and Harrer, among other duties, as a private tutor and confidant to the fourteenth Dalai Lama.

Their idyllic existence in Lhasa, however, ended abruptly in the closing months of that pivotal year, 1950, when the Chinese Communists invaded the eastern part of Tibet. Although the difficulties of travel during the harsh winter would impede their progress for several months, the Chinese showed no indication of halting until they "liberated" Tibet. Harrer fled in mid-November, and the Dalai Lama and his entourage followed soon after in a journey that *Life* magazine described as a "historic trek over the Himalayas to escape reds."29

Until March of 1951, Harrer remained with the exiled Dalai Lama in the village of Yatung, nestled in the Chumbi Valley, and then trekked the caravan route to Kalimpong. There, at the infamous Himalayan Hotel, and, later, at the home of Marco Pallis, he began to record his epic journey--from imprisonment at the hands of the British to a two-year voluntary exile in an often unforgiving landscape to his unprecedented sojourn in Lhasa.30 Published in 1952, *Seven Years in Tibet* was soon translated into all major languages and became an international success. Harrer remains perhaps the most widely read author on Tibet.

Harrer never embraced Tibetan Buddhism, but did not condemn this underpinning of Tibetan culture as Patterson did. Rather, he seems to have been influenced by the tradition of Tibetan tolerance; he stated:

'...one must not offend against people's beliefs. The Tibetans were happy in

their own convictions and had never tried to convert Aufschnaiter or me. We contented ourselves with studying their customs, visiting their temples as spectators, and making presents of white silk scarves as etiquette prescribed.\footnote{Hairer, \textit{Seven Years in Tibet}, p. 202.}

**Shambhala and Tibetan Studies: George Roerich**

A Western observer is apt to belittle the importance of [Shambhala] or to relegate the voluminous literature about Shambhala . . . into the class of folklore or mythology; but those who have studied both literary and popular Buddhism know the terrific force that this name possesses among the masses of Buddhists of higher Asia . . . Let us not diminish the importance of this awakening force . . . Let us reserve our opinion till the time when all the vast literature of Kalacakra will be translated . . . and the vast oral tradition of Buddhism studied and traced to its sources.\footnote{George Roerich. Trails to Inmost Asia, Five Years of Exploration with the Roerich Central Asia Expedition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), p. 156.}

\textit{George Roerich}

One might say that George Roerich was weaned on Theosophy and Central Asia. Both of his parents were profoundly driven by Madame Blavatsky’s movement. While in his mid-twenties, in 1923, George accompanied his father, Nicholas, and his brother, Svetoslav on a five-year expedition to explore Central Asia. On this journey, the Roerichs looked for signs of the imminent advent of Maitreya, the future Buddha, a notion that Theosophists shared.\footnote{See page 12 for more information on the Theosophical conception of Maitreya.}

For the Roerichs, the appearance of Maitreya was intimately linked with one of the most potent myths to animate Tibetan Buddhism—Shambhala.\footnote{According to Edwin Bernbaum, \textit{The Way to Shambhala, A Search for the Mythical Kingdom Behind the Himalayas} (Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher, 1980), p. 4, while many Westerners have regarded Tibet as the mysterious hidden sanctuary, Tibetans themselves have looked elsewhere for such a place. Their sacred texts point to Shambhala, a mystical kingdom hidden behind snow peaks somewhere north of Tibet.}

\textit{Kalachakra Tantra,}\footnote{The \textit{Kalachakra Tantra} is a complex, mystical interpretation of the Buddhist \textit{dharma} which influenced all sects of Tibetan Buddhism and became the most important teaching of the Yellow Hat doctrine, the main sect of Buddhism in Tibet.} Shambhala is a harmonious society ruled by a lineage of enlightened kings. The myth tells of how a peaceful army, led by the King Rigden-jyepo, will one day rise forth from his hidden kingdom—some believed it to be located in Tibet—to save the world from destruction and inaugurate a golden age of enlightened culture.
Nicholas believed that he and his family would be important actors in this epic drama. Those who wanted to help prepare the way for Maitreya must be ready at all times to ride with the King of Shambhala. Nicholas had announced the coming of Maitreya in several articles and poems and also made it the subject of much of his artwork, most of which is presently displayed in the Roerich Museum in New York City. In 1934, the mystically inclined Henry Wallace, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture and one of his future vice-presidents (1940), sent Roerich on a government-sponsored expedition to Central Asia ostensibly in search of drought-resistant grasses that might help relieve conditions in the Dust Bowl. According to Newsweek (March 22, 1948), it was common knowledge around the Department of Agriculture that Wallace, who knew about Shambhala, also "wanted Roerich to look for signs of the Second Coming."

Whether or not Nicholas' son, too, believed in the imminent appearance of King of Shambhala is difficult to determine with certainty. The scholar was a very reclusive man who chose to limit his conversations and writing to academic subjects concerning Tibet and the status of Buddhism in the eastern Himalayas. In Kalimpong, George, however, was always "booted, if not spurred," ready to ride.

Theosophy and Shambhala aside, George Roerich had an excellent reputation as a scholar. At university, he had studied Persian, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese. His book Trails to Inmost Asia, Five Years of Exploration with the Roerich Central Asian Expedition paints a scientific picture of the life and civilizations of the nomads of Central

---

36 Sangharakshita, Facing Mount Kanchenjunga, p. 52; Batchelor, The Awakening of the West, p. 366.
37 Bernbaum, p. 22.
38 Newsweek, March 22, 1948. In 1936, Roerich's services with the government were "terminated." Although the official announcement gave no reason for the action, newspaper reporters were told off the record that Roerich was regarded as a spy by certain officials of Manchukuo. In 1948, Westbrook Pegler, a conservative columnist, published the correspondence between Wallace and Roerich as the so-called "Guru Letters," which discredited Wallace and ended his political career. If FDR had died before the 1944 election instead of after it, a man deeply influenced by the Tibetan myth of Shambhala would have become president of the United States (Bernbaum, p. 22).
39 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/19/94; Sangharakshita (editor), Stepping-Stones.
40 Sangharakshita, Facing Mount Kanchenjunga, p. 53.
Asia. According to Sangharakshita, Tibetans in Kalimpong claimed that he was the only Westerner who had ever really mastered the different forms of the Tibetan equivalent of the verb "to be"—quite a feat, one that even Marco Pallis, an excellent Tibetan scholar as well, failed to accomplish. In Kalimpong, Roerich, a "plump, ruddy-faced man" with a "little waxen-pointed beard" worked on his translation of the *Blue Annals*, an important Tibetan historical text written during the last part of the fifteenth century by the great scholar known as 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba, and acted as an adviser to the Young Men's Buddhist Association, the Buddhist movement in Kalimpong started by Sangharakshita.

Without a doubt, each individual in this eclectic gathering was enamored with Tibet—whether for its religion, culture, rugged travel, academic opportunities, or the "perfect courtesy" of its people. The quotes introducing each character reflect this enchantment, in most cases, bordering on romanticization. Perhaps Heinrich Harrer developed the most realistic attitude toward Tibet and its people. Like Patterson, he lived among the Tibetans and learned about their customs firsthand. Harrer, however, was not mesmerized by Patterson's beloved Khambas; he writes of their "lawlessness" and the "cruelty with which they sometimes put their victims to death." Unlike Pallis, he addressed the shortcomings of Tibetan culture:

As a product of the modern age, I could not understand why the people were so rigidly opposed to any forms of progress. There must obviously be some better means of transporting these heavy burdens than by manhandling them. The Chinese invented and used the wheel thousands of years ago. But the Tibetans will have none of it, though its use would give an immense pulse to transport and commerce and would raise the whole standard of living through-

---

41 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/13/94.
42 Richardson and Snellgrove, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, p. 151.
44 Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet*, p. 217.
45 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/19/94.
46 Harrer, p. 90.
In contrast to Lama Govinda, Harrer does not sentimentalize the ecclesiastical authority in Tibet:

The supremacy of the monastic orders in Tibet is something unique. It can well be compared to a stern dictatorship. The monks distrust any influence from the outside world which might undermine their authority. They are clever enough not to believe their power is limitless, but they punish anyone who suggests that it is not.  

Finally, Harrer did not invariably dress in riding boots. Nevertheless, the Austrian was deeply affected by Tibet.

A sense of the background and personality of each individual in this generation of Tibet enthusiasts lays the foundation for an understanding of how each character directly experienced and imagined Tibet. In the following section, we shall explore these different conceptions of Tibet and how each imagining informed the actions of our characters when the very survival of Tibet was threatened.

SOME CONNECTIONS: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

... what is happening in Tibet is symbolical for the fate of humanity. As on a gigantically raised stage we witness the struggle between two worlds, which may be interpreted, ... as the struggle between the past and the future, between backwardness and progress, ... or as the struggle between spiritual freedom and material power, ... between the dignity of the human individual and the herd-instinct of the mass, between the faith in the higher destiny of man through inner development and the belief in material prosperity through an ever-increasing production of goods.  

Lama Govinda

The years 1950 and 1951 marked a turning point in the lives of the individuals examined in this study, perhaps with the exception of the elusive George Roerich. The invasion by the Chinese Communists threatened their very conception of Tibet—the animating force in their lives. The potential demise of Tibet galvanized this miscellaneous group into unification. Each man was inspired to defend his Tibet in a way that reflected

48 Ibid. p. 89.
his own talents and imagining of Tibet.

The sense of urgency in the mission to "save Tibet" cannot be understated. Each of the characters envisioned the establishment of a communist Tibet as tragic or epic or both tragic and epic, as in the case of Lama Govinda and Marco Pallis. Perhaps Lama Govinda expressed this crisis most eloquently—and dramatically. By nature, he was a reclusive man and mystically inclined. Is it then surprising that he spoke out against the actions of the Chinese Communists? Had it not been for the vision of a destroyed Tibet, he may have remained a very minor Buddhist scholar of Tibet.\(^50\) For him, the question "Why is it that the fate of Tibet has found such a deep echo in the world?" had only one answer. Tibet "has become a symbol of all that present-day humanity is longing for, either because it has been lost or not yet been realized or because it is in danger of disappearing from human sight."\(^51\) Thus the preservation of Tibet was crucial.

Marco Pallis's Tibet was "the last stronghold where Tradition rules intact." For him, the consequence of the destruction of traditional Tibet would be the leveling effects of "totalitarian materialism"—the "logical outcome of the non-traditional way of life."\(^52\) Consistent with his traditionalist views, Pallis was vehemently anti Communist.\(^53\) According to Sangharakshita, who had befriended Pallis during his stay, Pallis's bungalow was "very much like a cave, with treasures heaped just inside the entrance, but with a tunnel running from the back of the cave into the darkness—a tunnel down which Pallis disappeared from time to time and which was the venue for all kinds of mysterious activities."\(^54\) Marco Pallis actively assisted the Tibetan resistance movement in Kalimpong.

The swashbuckling missionary, George Patterson is perhaps the least complex of

---

\(^{50}\) Winkler, *A Thousand Journeys*, p. 135.

\(^{51}\) Govinda, p. xi.

\(^{52}\) Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas*, p. 228.

\(^{53}\) Sangharakshita, interview, 5/13/94.

all the characters in this study. His passionate anti-communism fits well into the prevalent rhetoric of opposites. Unwilling to ally with any side but that of God's, he claimed to be uninterested in "imperialism, Communism, neutralism, or American way-of-life-ism." Clearly, his love of the Khambas can be explained in part by their armed struggle against the communists. In Kalimpong, Patterson aligned himself with the Americans, acting as interpreter and disseminator of information in several of the meetings between Tibetan and American officials. The consul general in Calcutta, Garrett H. Soulen, notes in a dispatch to Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, that the consulate general had developed "considerable confidence in his discretion, his thoroughly anti-Communist viewpoint, and his large fund of information on Tibet and Tibetan personalities."^56

Heinrich Harrer and Peter Aufschnaiter had planned to spend the rest of their lives in Tibet. Although each realized that Tibet was by no means "Shangri-la," Europe with its "turmoil" and "depressing news" offered no inducement to go home. His poignant thoughts on the future of Tibet echo the sentiments of Govinda and Pallis—and reflect a familiar polarization:

I knew that life in Potala would be darkened by the shadow of Mao Tse-tung. Instead of peaceful prayer flags, I thought of the Red flag with its hammer and sickle floating in the wind with its claim to world dominion. Perhaps Chenrezi, the eternal God of Grace, would survive this soulless regime as he had survived so many Chinese invasions. I could only hope that the most peaceful nation on earth would not have to suffer too much and would not be demoralized by revolutionary changes.

Harrer, too, collaborated with representatives of the U.S. government in India. His name surfaces in at least five U.S. State Department documents from March 29, 1951

---

^55 Patterson, Tragic Destiny, p. 22.

^56 USFR, 611.93b/9-1751, dispatch no. 119 from the U.S. consul general in Calcutta (Garrett H. Soulen) to the U.S secretary of state, dated 17 September 1951. Memorandum of conversation between Yangpel Pangdatshang, officers of the Consulate General in Calcutta, and George Patterson.

^57 Harrer, p. 182.

^58 The emphasis is my own: this soulless regime, the most peaceful nation on earth.

^59 Ibid. p. 312.
to October 1, 1951. Patterson claimed that the Austrian had even approached the Americans with plans for forming an anti-Communist group among some of the Tibetan officials. Both Patterson and Harrer worked with the United States government in ways that, no doubt, indulged their sense of adventure and allowed each to utilize his knowledge of the Tibetan land and its people.

Finally, the character of Roerich remains somewhat of an enigma. Fraser Wilkins described Roerich as "reportedly anti-American and pro-Soviet," the "son of Nicholas Roerich from Central Europe who had a rather shady reputation in China as a Russian collaborator in Sinkiang about 1927." Perhaps the scandal linked with his father explains his reticence to discuss or write about the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese Communists.

Some believed the victory of the Chinese Communists signified the establishment of a Pure Land—not unlike the "new age" to be ushered in by the King of Shambhala. Again, it is uncertain what Roerich believed. Many speculated that he advocated communism. According to Sangharakshita, however, this is unlikely. Roerich and Pallis, if not friends, at least occasionally fraternized with one another. If Roerich had any sympathy toward communism, the vehemently anti-Communist Pallis would not have associated with him.

At the same time, unlike the other members of this generation of Tibet lovers, Roerich did not actively and publicly seek to prevent the fall of his Tibet to the Chinese. In Kalimpong, he did, however, continue to work on translations of Tibetan texts—one

---

61 Patterson, Tragic Destiny, p. 88. According to Harrer, this plan—initially viewed with hope by the Americans—was shelved, at least for the time being, when it was discovered that the key-man in the plan was the one the Chinese had used to try and intimidate Takster Rimpoche, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, with threats in Calcutta. Takster Rimpoche escaped to the United States on July 5, 1951. In America, he shed his religious and was known as Thubten Norbu. He became a professor at Indiana University.
62 Memorandum describing Kalimpong and its residents, dated 12 May 1951, enclosed (number 1) with USFR, 611.93/B/5-2451, letter from Fraser Wilkins, U.S. Embassy in India, to the U.S. Department of State, dated 24 May 1951.
63 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/19/94.
way in which to demonstrate to the rest of the world the importance of Tibetan culture and its traditions. Perhaps, in the long run, his efforts will be the most lasting and effective.

By October 1951, the Dalai Lama had returned to Lhasa and accepted the terms of the Seventeen Point Agreement. Each of these individuals, however, continued to defend his rendering of Tibet. Their efforts would prove fruitless. By 1959, the "Tibetan question" would be answered unequivocally with resounding gunshots in Lhasa. Yet Kalimpong's eccentric group of visionaries collectively participated in the imaginative creation and structure of twentieth century Tibet.

THE AMERICAN CONNECTION

American Contact with Tibet

Until the 1940s, American contact with Tibet had been limited mostly to the stray intrepid traveler, for example, Theos Bernard of Arizona, and Suydam Cutting, a naturalist who journeyed to Lhasa in 1935. In 1942 an American expedition led by Ilya Tolstoy, grandson of the famous Russian novelist, passed through Lhasa and was favorably received. Tolstoy, bearing a letter and gifts from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, had instructions to survey secretly the Tibetan terrain in search of a new supply route from India to China. The Tibetan government claimed that it was the first time "friendly relations" had been established between Tibet and the U.S.A. Six years later, the 1948 Tibetan Trade Mission to the West made headlines in the United States.

While the United States did not choose to have a direct political link with Tibet

64 Thomas, Out of This World, p. 24.
65 Goldstein, A History of Tibet, p. 393.
66 Ibid. p. 395.
until it was forced to consider the consequences of communism there, it did have an
indirect and more mundane connection—one facilitated by Kalimpong. The United States
was the largest final purchaser of Tibetan yak wool. As wool formed the bulk of Tibet's
export economy and provided the means for many livelihoods, this relationship was crucial
to Tibet.

In April of 1951 the wool trade had come to a halt. Bales of wool remained
stacked for days in the trade houses of Kalimpong, one of the key receiving stations of
Tibetan wool. The issue of yak wool trade thus constituted an important item on the
agenda of many discussions held between American representatives to Kalimpong and
concerned Tibetan officials. Tibetans, such as Liushar, construed the American lack of
response to the wool crisis as an indication that the United States was not interested in
supporting Tibet. American representatives were sent to Kalimpong at this time to
assuage these and other worries of important Tibetan officials.

It is interesting to note the U.S. State Department's prior preoccupation with
Tibet. This attention is reflected in a significant number of documents, both published and
unpublished (U.S. Foreign Relations and USFR), where Tibet figured prominently. Prior
to the beginning of the Korean War, Tibet garnered more consideration than Korea.

**American Political Activity in Kalimpong**

The distance in miles from Calcutta to Kalimpong is not much greater than from
Washington to New York, but in traveling it one suddenly passes from an over­
crowded, humid, hot industrial area to a sparsely inhabited, cool agricultural com­
unity—from the twentieth century to an age of gods and demons, of spiritual lords,
kings, princes, and feudal barons—from the many-faceted economy of India to Tibet's
simple economy of barter and the export of wool, yak tails, and musk. . .

Fraser Wilkins

In May 1951, Loy Henderson, the U.S. Ambassador to India, sent Fraser Wilkins,

---

67 Summary of the Tibetan wool situation according to Yangpel Pangdatshang, written by Fraser Wilkins U.S.
Embassy in India, dated 12 May 1951, enclosed (number 9) with USFR, 611.93B/5-2451, to the U.S. Department of
State, dated 24 May 1951.
68 Memorandum describing Kalimpong and its residents. See footnote 157
First Secretary of the Embassy in New Delhi, to Kalimpong to communicate directly American interest in Tibet. Kalimpong with its concentration of Tibetan officials, most notably Dzasa Liushar, one of Tibet's two foreign secretaries, and Yangpel Pangdatshang, the Tibetan Trade Agent at Yatung, now provided one of the best venues for establishing contacts and unraveling Tibetan attitudes toward the Chinese. According to Fraser Wilkins, Kalimpong was not only important for the Tibetans who lived there and its proximity to the "Land of the Snows." He also identified another group consisting mainly of foreigners and Indians interested in Tibet. He noted that it was through this "continually expanding and contracting" collection of individuals "that the world receives most of its reports about Tibet." Three members of our generation of Tibet lovers, Marco Pallis, George Roerich, and George Patterson, are described briefly in Wilkins' despatch to the State Department.

Wilkins's description of Kalimpong echoes a language and style that is now familiar. His portrait creates a mood similar to that conjured by other Westerners intrigued with Tibet. Indeed, his prose suggests that elements of the myth of Tibet have spilled over the Himalayas and into the caravan town facing Mount Kanchenjunga. The generous use of opposites—"over-crowded" vs. "sparsely inhabited," "twentieth century" (read modern) vs. "an age of gods and demons"—sets the tone for his "outstanding" despatch. Throughout the spring and summer of 1951, he and other American representatives would meet with both Tibetans and Westerners in Kalimpong.

69 Despatch 2891, May 24, 1951 states that "in recent months, the U.S. Embassy in India had little direct knowledge of developments in Tibet and communication with Tibetan officials due to the invasion by the Chinese Communists. As a result, Tibetan representatives ceased visiting New Delhi for fear of becoming entangled with the Chinese Ambassador there."

70 Memorandum describing Kalimpong and its residents. See footnote 8 of this chapter.

71 USFR, despatch no. 30, 611.93b/8-2351, letter from the U.S State Department (Richard P. Butrick, Director General of the Foreign Service) to the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi (Loy Henderson, U.S. Ambassador), dated 23 August 1951. In the despatch, Mr. Wilkins is commended for the preparation of this despatch: "This is an outstanding despatch which Mr. Wilkins has prepared reporting his trip to Kalimpong and his talks with various Tibetans and other residents of Kalimpong. The despatch and its enclosures contain a wealth of information concerning current views of representative Tibetan officials regarding the problem created by Communist China's program of establishing its authority over Tibet."
The American desire to keep Tibet from falling into the hands of the Chinese Communists intensified as the days of summer dwindled. To be sure, developments in Korea explain this motivation in part. But consider the significance of Robert Linn, the American Consular Attaché at Calcutta, collaborating with Patterson and Harrer in a rather wild plot to rescue the Dalai Lama from the Chinese Communists. If the Dalai Lama were to flee to India, the reasoning went, Tibet—-but which Tibet?—had a better chance of surviving. The Khamba-loving Patterson and pragmatic Harrer might have been the intermediaries responsible for saving Tibet.

My point here is not to outline the general U.S. policy toward Tibet at this time nor is it to describe in detail the various meetings and conversations that occurred in Kalimpong. Rather, let me suggest that the beginnings of American policy with Tibet can be better understood within the context of Kalimpong and, indeed, its eclectic group of visionaries. To be sure, the Cold War influenced American decisions. The possibility of Tibet as a bastion of anti communism, returning Tibet to its traditional status as buffer state between China and India, appealed to the United States. Harrer's image of Tibet as the "most peaceful nation on earth" and China as a "soulless regime" fit well into the rhetoric of the most adamant cold warriors. Consider instead the possibility of the realpolitik converging with the mythic. Perhaps decisions made at the highest levels of government draw upon elements of myth and the visions of eccentric individuals. Think about the dreams of Harry Truman and Douglas MacArthur.

---

72 In the Introduction to this study, scene #2 (page 1) refers to Linn's plan.
CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the Western fascination with Tibet is not a fleeting oddity or insubstantial phenomenon in Western cultural history. Indeed, it is one that continues to this day. The myth of Tibet has animated generations of Tibet lovers and reached a wide range of individuals including artists, writers, scholars, adventurers, and politicians. The creation of successive Tibets since the eighteenth century has been founded on a complex world of images--forms, colors, textures--and individual and collective desires. How Tibet was directly experienced and imagined by Westerners may tell us more about Western fantasies than they do about the "real" Tibet.

Marco Pallis, Lama Govinda, George Patterson, Heinrich Harrer, and George Roerich represent a collage of "contending fantasies." Yet, they are brought together by a location, Kalimpong, and a specific time, 1950. Their diverse imaginings assumed a common coherence as each sought in his unique way to "save Tibet"--albeit his imagining of Tibet--from an unfortunate and tragic destruction. The involvement of the reclusive Lama Govinda in this activity may be the most graphic illustration of the power of this potent image and myth.

The roots of American policy toward Tibet can be traced to this time. Important information was gathered in Kalimpong--sometimes even from our generation of Tibet lovers. While I am not suggesting that the myth of Tibet and the characters of the study provided the basis for American decisions on Tibet, I would like to expand the context within which to view these decisions. The Cold War played a major role in the formulation of American policy toward Tibet. But, today, the United States continues to be the Western country most interested in Tibet. Allegedly, the Cold War is over.

1 Bishop, The Myth of Shangri-la, p. viii.
CONCLUSION

Perhaps it is not a preposterous stretch of the imagination to link the attitude of this generation of Tibet lovers in Kalimpong to the comparatively uninformed "save Tibet" mentality now visible on stickers decorating automobiles across the United States.
In August of 1951, the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa where he attempted to work within the terms of the Seventeen Point Agreement. After 1955, increasing Chinese interference in the affairs of the Tibetan government created more unbearable tension. Finally, the invasion of Lhasa by the communists in 1959 forced the Dalai Lama and most of his key officials to flee to India.\(^1\)

The awarding of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama "not only confirmed the stature of Tibet's exiled leader but also the immense imaginative power of his elusive country and its religion."\(^2\) The revered leader still lives in exile in the north of India. In America particularly, Tibet continues to engage the imagination and informs U.S. policy toward China.

With the exception of Marco Pallis, the generation of Tibet lovers in Kalimpong continued to be animated by the myth of Tibet throughout their lives. In 1984, Heinrich Harrer returned to Tibet. Harrer, who maintains his friendship with the Dalai Lama, recently published a book called *Lost Lhasa: Heinrich Harrer's Tibet* [New York: Hood River, 1992]. Lama Govinda wrote extensively on Tibetan Buddhism and exposed thousands of individuals to this richly symbolic interpretation of Buddhism. He began a Buddhist movement in the West and died in January of 1985. In 1957, George Roerich was asked by the Government of India to leave Kalimpong.\(^3\) He returned to Khruschev's Russia where he was appointed as the first director of the Buddhist branch of the Institute

\(^1\) Goldstein, p. 825.
\(^3\) According to Sangharakshita, George Roerich had no intention of leaving Kalimpong, but the two possible reasons for his return to the Soviet Union are unsubstantiated. Apparently, the source of Roerich's financial means was gold brought to him from Mongolia. One theory explaining his hasty departure from India held that George Roerich was in the pay of the Communists—Russian, Chinese, or Mongolian—who were financing him. This may have been what the Indian government believed. Another held that his father, Nicholas, while traveling in the area (Mongolia), deposited gold in a certain place; it was this gold that was being sent to George from time to time.
of Oriental Studies in Moscow. He died of a heart attack at age 50 in 1960. In 1987, George Patterson returned to Tibet. Like Harrer, he describes Tibet under Chinese rule as full of "dreary dullness, apathy, conformity, and sadness, sullenness, fear and despair."

Because of his involvement with the Tibetan resistance movement, Marco Pallis was asked by the Government of India to leave Kalimpong in the early 1950s. He returned to England. Disappointed and even disillusioned with the way in which so many Tibetans who came to the West became Westernized, he ceased to have any contact in more recent years with the Tibetans. He continued to pursue his interests in Buddhism and in the revival of pre-baroque and baroque music. He published a book called *A Buddhist Spectrum* in 1980 and died in 1989.

Sangharakshita became more involved with Tibetan Buddhism in Kalimpong in the mid to late 1950s, studying with several Tibetan teachers. He returned to England in 1964 and began a Buddhist movement called the Western Buddhist Order (W.B.O). The W.B.O incorporates elements from each of the three main movements in Buddhism, including Tibetan Buddhism.

Today, Kalimpong is a sleepy town still arguably one of the most beautifully positioned spots in the world. With the eventual closure of the caravan route to Tibet, trade has dried up while the neighboring town of Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, thrives. In addition to three Tibetan monasteries, its main attractions are spectacular views of Mount Kanchenjunga and an excellent private library for the study of Tibetan and Himalayan languages and cultures.

---

6 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/19/94.
8 Sangharakshita, interview, 5/19/94.
REFERENCES

PUBLICATIONS


REFERENCES


FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS

REFERENCES


ORAL INTERVIEWS


Lowell Thomas, Jr., American journalist who traveled to Lhasa with his father; Lowell Thomas, Sr. in the summer of 1949; telephone interview, 7/2/94.

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

U.S. Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (identified as *U.S. Foreign Relations, ...*)


REFERENCES

UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

British Foreign Office Records, London (Identified as FO . . . ).

MEDIA

Bessac, Frank. "This Was the Perilous Trek to Tragedy." *Life*, November 13, 1950, pp. 131-141.