IMAGINING TIBET

Perceptions, Projections, & Fantasies

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TIBETAN HORIZON

TIBET AND THE CINEMA IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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"I WONDER IF JAMES HILTON ever set foot in Tibet," wrote Spencer Chapman in "Tibetan Horizon," a 1937 essay in the journal *Sight and Sound*. "Certainly the producers of the film version of *Lost Horizon* would have benefited if they had been able to visit this remote and inaccessible country. They might have saved themselves even this inconvenience if they had been able to see the photographic results of Mr. B. J. Gould's recent diplomatic mission to Lhasa."[1] Chapman had been responsible for making documentary films in Tibet during Gould's mission, and his article promoted the upcoming screening of his films in London. While the mission was still in Tibet, Chapman had shown many of his Tibetan films to Tibetan audiences along with a variety of Western films that the mission had brought with them to Lhasa.

The parallel between these two events in the early twentieth century—making documentary films in Tibet and showing them to Tibetans—raises two related questions, which I will address in this essay. What was the portrayal of Tibet in these films? And how did Tibetans react to them? To answer these questions, I will examine some of the films made in Tibet in the early twentieth century, especially those taken during the Mount Everest expeditions in the 1920s and the Gould missions to Tibet in the 1930s and 1940s. Since many of the films made in Tibet are still unavailable for viewing, much of what follows is, of necessity, somewhat speculative. Yet I want to suggest that the portrayal of Tibet in these films was shaped by the Tibetan reaction

to them. Tibet was represented in documentary films in ambiguous ways that call into question the extent to which Western representations of Tibet, such as the book or film versions of *Lost Horizon,* were merely projections of Western fantasies. While I am unaware of Tibetan reactions to *Lost Horizon* in the 1930s (and there may well have been some), the Tibetan reaction to these documentary films suggests that the relationship between Tibet and the cinema was profoundly intercultural.

Tibetans as well as the British contributed to the construction of cinematic myths of Tibet. British documentaries concentrated on the rituals of Tibetan Buddhism at the expense of depictions of everyday life in Tibet. This was as much the result of Tibetan desires as of Western myths. In the 1920s, Tibetans were so offended by the portrayal of Tibetan life in the Mount Everest films that they canceled future Everest expeditions. Yet in the 1930s, Tibetans watched Western movies and films about Tibet. In consequence, they envisioned a place for the cinema within Buddhism.

These intercultural exchanges and documentary films of the early twentieth century were the product of a unique moment in the history of Tibet and the history of film. The controversies over the Everest films ensured that few people other than British diplomats were allowed to make films in Tibet. In the 1940s, especially during World War II, the British increasingly used the cinema in Tibet as an instrument of British propaganda, a tendency that became even more pronounced in the 1950s after the Chinese invasion and has changed only recently. Since a few articles and film festivals have surveyed the portrayal of Tibet in the cinema since the 1950s, I will not directly discuss these more recent developments.[2] I will, however, close with some brief reflections on the implications of this large archive of documentary films for recent feature films and the politics of Tibetan culture in the present.

Perhaps the earliest films ever made in Tibet were shot during the British attempts to climb Mount Everest. In the face of Chinese military threats in the early 1920s, Tibet had given the British permission to ascend Everest in exchange for British weapons. Cinematographer Captain John Noel made two silent films on these expeditions: *Climbing Mount Everest* (U.K., 1922) and *The Epic of Everest* (U.K., 1924). In addition, his film company brought a group of Tibetan monks from Gyantse to London without the permission of the Tibetan government to perform on stage before screenings of *The Epic of Everest* in 1924. The Tibetan government was so offended by the performances of the "dancing lamas," and by certain scenes in the film, that it withdrew permission for future Everest expeditions by the British, until Chinese military threats reappeared in the early 1930s.[3] In addition, the controversy over the "dancing lamas" tipped the balance of power within Tibet from the military to the monasteries in the mid-1920s, and affected the way British and Tibetans viewed future films about Tibet.

Both Everest films incorporated extended anthropological travelogues of Tibetan life. *Climbing Mount Everest* showed Tibetan dances, weaving, headdresses, monasteries, sports, and so on. The following intertitle is representative: "Visiting the towns of Kamba, Shekar and the Monastery of Rongbuk, we gained many interesting glimpses into the life, manners, and customs of the strange people of Tibet." Like other ethnographic surveys of Tibetan life, these films recorded ceremonies and classified a variety of Tibetan "types." Even the porters were so classified through film. One of the longest, and by far the most interesting, sequences in the film shows General C. G. Bruce, leader of the Everest expedition in 1922, meeting Zatul Rinpoche, the head lama of the Rongbuk Monastery, followed by dances of the other monks at the monastery. Noel's second film, *The Epic of Everest,* also developed the contrast between the extroverted, aggressive, and manly British climbers with the introverted, passive, and squalid but mystical Tibetans. The film shows the British climbers walking confidently into the mountains that Tibetan legends claimed were inhabited by deities. The film concluded by invoking the powers of the Rongbuk lama, as a mystical explanation for the expedition's failure to reach the summit.[4]

The London performances of the "dancing lamas," which continued a well-developed practice of putting "natives" on display, generated widespread interest in Britain. By studying its ancient texts, nineteenth-century scholars had aimed to recover the "essence" of Buddhism that preceded its "decline" into "Lamaism," but the dancing lamas, as the word made flesh, now questioned British assumptions that Buddhism

was a textual object under their control. But their performances and certain scenes in the film upset the Tibetans. In the most controversial scene, a Tibetan man appeared to pick lice out of a boy's hair and then eat the lice. (The scene does not appear in current viewing copies of the film.) F. M. Bailey, the political officer of Sikkim, warned the filmmakers that the "lice-eating" scene had caused offense when the film had been shown in India. "The Tibetans say that this is not typical and will give the world the wrong impression."[5]

By the spring of 1925, these events led to the cancellation of future expeditions to Everest. The prime minister of Tibet complained to Bailey that "they have enticed and taken away to England four or five monks, whose photos as dancers have appeared recently in the newspapers. We regard this action on the part of the Sahibs as very unbecoming. For the future, we cannot give them permission to go to Tibet." The prime minister also demanded "the immediate return to Tibet and handing over of the monks, who have been taken away deceitfully." After Leslie Weir visited Lhasa as political officer of Sikkim in 1930, he reported that the Dalai Lama had seen pictures of the "dancing lamas" in the weekly picture papers and looked "on the whole affair as a direct affront to the religion of which he is the head." In addition, the maharaja of Sikkim and an agent of the maharaja of Bhutan had seen the film in Darjeeling and found the "lice-eating" scene "extremely repugnant."[6]

The controversy over the dancing lamas also intervened in the internal politics of Tibet. Conflicts between the monasteries, the police, and the army had split "traditionalists" and "modernists" in Tibet in 1924. A possible coup attempt by Tsarong Shape, the Tibetan commander-in-chief, and Laden La, a Sikkimese official in Lhasa to train the police force, has remained the subject of much speculation. In the event, the Dalai Lama demoted Tsarong and other military officers immediately after the performances of the dancing lamas and at the same time refused permission for another Everest expedition in April 1925. Since Tibetan permission for Everest had been given in the context of Sino-Tibetan military hostilities and in exchange for British weapons, the fate of the Everest expeditions was inextricably linked to the political fortunes of Tsarong and the military in Tibet. After earlier offenses, the

controversy over the dancing lamas as well as other events in Lhasa weakened the positions of Tsarong and the Everest expeditions.[7]

The global reach of early twentieth-century cinema expanded the audience for the Everest films to include even the Tibetans themselves. The Dalai Lama saw pictures of the dancing lamas in the London papers, and officials from Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan watched the Everest films in India. These media enabled the Tibetans to see themselves as they were seen by others, and the Tibetans responded by vigorously challenging what they saw. Tibetans recognized that they were part of a global media environment when they objected to the "lice-eating" scene because it would "give the world the wrong impression." Tibet also banned film crews from later Everest expeditions because access by the media—the right to make representations—had itself become one of the bargaining chips of diplomacy.

As a result of these controversies, few people were allowed to make films in Tibet in the late 1920s and early 1930s. William McGovern apparently made a film during his secret trip to Tibet in the early 1920s, but over the next decade a number of travelers were explicitly denied permission to enter Tibet because they intended to make films there.[8] Yet at the same time these travelers were being turned away, British diplomats and officials (among them F. M. Bailey, Charles Bell, Leslie Weir, and Frederick Williamson—British political officers in Sikkim) made their own films in Tibet. During the height of the controversy over the dancing lamas in 1925, Bailey filmed the monks at the Gyantse Monastery preforming their "devil dances." One of Bailey's films, *Tibet, circa 1928* (U.K., c. 1928), shows porters drinking tea, farmers harvesting wheat, a man spinning a prayer wheel, a shepherd herding his flock with a slingshot, a man plowing with a yak, and a caravan of yaks loaded with wool.[9] A few foreign scientists obtained permission to film in Tibet. Wilhelm Filchner, a German geophysicist and polar explorer, filmed dances at the Kumbum monastery in northeast Tibet beginning in 1926, and later journeys in Tibet and Nepal added footage for a film entitled *Dancing Lamas and Soldiers* (in the Buddhist Kingdom), (Germany, c. 1937).[10] Charles Suydam Cutting, an American ethnologist and botanist, made films recording spinning at Gyantse, yak caravans, the monasteries at Shigatse and Lhasa, and animal-skin

boats on the Tsangpo River.[11] As far as I am aware, however, the films by these British diplomats or foreign scientists received only limited circulation.

Tibetan and British fears about the representation of Tibet on film may well have been realized by the few commercial films about Tibet. A short film entitled *Tibet: Land of Isolation* (U.S., 1934), made by American James A. FitzPatrick as part of his well-known series of travelogues is a good example. Although it is unclear where the film was shot, the soundtrack is more Chinese than Tibetan in inspiration. The film provides commentary on everyday life in Tibet, including yaks, butter-making, the role of women, earrings, tongue greetings, river crossings, the possibility of finding gold, local medical practices, and the influence of "Lamaism." FitzPatrick's travelogue is essentially a visual catalogue of many Western myths about Tibet. The film's closing narration is typical: "And so life goes on among the people of Tibet where the progress of civilization is at the mercy of priestcraft and the destinies of men are eternally limited by the impregnable boundaries of superstition, ignorance and fear. And it is with this thought that we say farewell to Tibet, land of isolation."[12]

With such inauspicious precedents, and the Tibetan reluctance to let anyone make films in Tibet, why did British diplomats make their own films in Tibet? Basil Gould, for example, appears to have made filming Tibet a priority during his missions to Lhasa from 1936 into the 1940s. As Gould's private secretary in Tibet from 1936 to 1937, Spencer Chapman made films of Tibet, which he later showed to the Tibetans.[13] These were not the first visual images to be shown in Tibet: Earlier expeditions had brought lantern slides into the Himalayas. As early as 1920–21, Charles Bell watched films in Tsarong's private screening room, and F. M. Bailey showed films there in 1924. In the early 1930s, Frederick Williamson showed the Tibetans Charlie Chaplin and "Fritz the Cat" films. In 1935, Williamson also showed the Tibetans films he had taken in Tibet in 1933, as well as "a little mild propaganda with films of King George V's Silver Jubilee Celebrations and of the Hendon Air Display, as well as others of educational value."[14]

Basil Gould's use of film during his 1936 mission, however, appears to have been the most systematic effort up to that time. While Gould

may have been following precedent, in his autobiography he indirectly suggests several other reasons for making films in Tibet. It seems the films gave Gould a positional credibility with his British colleagues and Tibetan contacts. Gould noted that a British government official "was most likely to be helpful if he was interested in the peoples with whom I had to deal. In this connection 'Kodachrome' ciné films of Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet were of value." Since Gould also showed them to the Tibetans, these films also established the mission's credibility within Tibet. "The sight of themselves on screen was convincing proof to Tibetan audiences that what they saw was real."[15] Gould does not mention a wider context that is more speculative but perhaps more revealing. During the 1920s and 1930s, there was an extensive discussion within the British Empire about the use of the cinema in the education of indigenous peoples. This discussion led to several efforts to use film to record indigenous customs for anthropological research and to disseminate information of an educational nature among "natives." Gould showed the Tibetans films he had taken in Kenya, and his use of film in Lhasa was probably influenced by these wider contemporary debates over the use of the cinema in other parts of the empire.[16]

Whatever Gould's motives, it is clear that both British and Tibetans were influenced by the presence of Gould's film cameras. The mission staged some events for the cameras. When they entered Gyantse, for example, "Chapman went ahead with two cinemas" to shoot their arrival and official reception. At first, Chapman had to capture Tibetans on film before they knew what was happening. Consider Chapman's routine when he set up his cameras in advance and waited for a ceremonial procession: "As soon as they came into view I would 'shoot' them with the 35-mm. telephoto, then take a medium 16 mm. color 'shot,' return to the big camera again and take a near shot, repeat this with the color-camera, meanwhile firing off any still-cameras that I had been able to fix in the right position."[17]

Initially, the Tibetans were suspicious of Chapman's filming, especially since his 35-mm. film camera had a large lens. "But when, by using air mail each way, we were able to get the Kodachrome film back from England in time to show the officials moving photographs of themselves in natural color their enthusiasm knew no bounds and they

did all they could to help me." After the mission had been in Lhasa a few months, Chapman filmed a ceremony on the roof of the palace at dawn, and wrote in the mission diary: "Now that most of these officials have seen our films they take the presence of the 'camera man' as a matter of course."[18] Nevertheless, when Gould filmed the installation of the Dalai Lama in 1940, he noted that "this film was all taken more or less from a place of hiding behind a garden wall." Tibetan officials asked Chapman to film them at home, and he considered himself "like a court photographer." During the six months he spent in Lhasa, Chapman took 2,500 still photographs, 13,000 feet of 35-mm. film, 6,000 feet of 16-mm. Kodachrome color film, and 6,000 feet of 16-mm. black and white film.[19]

Even though Chapman took so much raw material, only one reel of Chapman's 16-mm. film survives in the British Film Institute. Chapman's 1936 film shows views of Lhasa and the Potala Palace, making whitewash for the palace, the Dalai Lama's shrine, an abbot, monks in ceremonial robes, the regent and his attendants, a pet fox and panther cub, flowers, geese, several dogs, and an extended sequence showing the regent's retinue traveling outside of Lhasa. Gould's 1940–41 films have survived in greater numbers and contain similar material.[20] Gould records leaving the residency in Sikkim and events en route to Gyantse and Lhasa. The climax of these films is the installation of the Dalai Lama. Afterward, the mission returns to Gangtok and Bhutan. The films provide intimate portraits of the families of the Dalai Lama, the maharajah of Sikkim, and the maharajah of Bhutan. These reels also show a number of official receptions, sporting events, and shots of wild flowers.

These cinematic representations of Tibet in the Chapman and Gould films were the product of a process of mirroring, an intercultural dialogue between British and Tibetans in which each contributed to the cinematic representation of Tibet. With their emphasis on the long journey and the ceremonial places and practices of Buddhism, Gould's films render the journey to Lhasa as a pilgrimage to see the installation of the Dalai Lama. The patterns of Tibetan daily life are almost completely absent. With the exception of the scene showing people making whitewash for the Potala Palace (itself a religious site), Chapman's films

depict few Tibetans at work. Tibetan pets appear as often as ordinary Tibetan people. Gould's attention to Tibetan sports and flowers also suggests that this is not a comprehensive ethnographic survey of Tibetan culture. These films incorporated both British projections of their myths about Tibet and Tibetan assumptions about what was worth filming in Tibet. This process of mirroring occurred most directly when the British mission showed their films of Tibet to Tibetans in Lhasa.

While they were in Lhasa, the British mission showed Tibetans their films about Tibet as well as other Western films. Before the Gould mission arrived in Lhasa, they checked their films to identify "those suitable for Tibetan audiences." Spencer Chapman also mentions that he spent much time "cutting out the parts unsuitable for Tibetan audiences."[21] Although no one ever identifies what criteria they used to judge films suitable or unsuitable, it is worth speculating. British diplomats in the 1930s were certainly aware of the Tibetan reaction to the Everest films of the 1920s. They avoided the depictions of ordinary life, such as the infamous "lice-eating" scene that had offended the Tibetans in the 1920s and concentrated instead on the places and practices of Tibetan Buddhism.

Chapman's Lhasa mission diary for 1936–37 describes a "typical" cinema party, when the British showed films to Tibetans. (For an extended extract, see the appendix to this article.) Alongside Chapman's own "florid" descriptions of his guests, he describes a deeply intercultural event. Films of Tibet and the West were shown side by side. "We started, as some of them had never before seen films, with something familiar to them, a film we have taken of the Potala and the Lhasa bazaar. This was followed by Rin-Tin-Tin in *The Night Cry.*" The juxtaposition of these two reels is difficult to interpret. What does one make of the popularity of Charlie Chaplin and Rin-Tin-Tin, a dog, in Tibet? Elsewhere, Chapman attributed the popularity of *The Night Cry* to "the simplicity of its theme and because it dealt with a subject—sheep farming—which was familiar to them." In addition, Chapman noted that Charlie Chaplin films depicting "the subtle comedy of dropping ice-creams down old ladies' evening dresses, and hitting unsuspecting people on the head with a mallet, appealed irresistably to the

Tibetan sense of humour." More optimistically, Gould suggested that the Tibetan appreciation of Charlie Chaplin and Rin-Tin-Tin demonstrated that "Tibetans laugh at just the same things and in the same tone, and appreciate beauty in just the same things, as Englishmen."[22] But the process of cross-cultural translation that occurred in these cinema parties was far more complicated and not nearly so transparent.

The Tibetan films that were shown to the Tibetans are even more difficult to interpret since we know so little about what they contained. If his surviving film is any guide, Chapman's films about Tibet consisted primarily of local landmarks, rituals, pets, and dignitaries. After the mission had been in Lhasa some time, Chapman made a point of showing his guests film versions of themselves. Such scenes were apparently very popular. Large numbers of monks and soldiers "gatecrashed" these events. The regent and other officials requested private cinema parties at their own homes. Tsarong received the following letter from his son who was then in school in Darjeeling: "Is there any talking picture in Lhasa? I heard there is talking picture in Lhasa, and every gentleman doesn't work, but go to see picture every night. I have nothing more to say."[23]

Few Tibetans made their own films in this period. On at least one occasion, Tsarong filmed the Anglo-Tibetan soccer matches outside Lhasa, and at other times he showed British visitors his own 8-mm. home movies.[24] A few films made in Tibet in the 1940s by Tsarong and by Jigme Taring have survived in private collections in the U.S. and India. From what I have heard of these films from people who have seen them, they depict the same ceremonies, dances, and so forth that feature so prominently in British films that Tibetans were shown at this time.

The longer-term consequences of the British cinema parties in Lhasa are difficult to assess. Chapman reported that at one of their last cinema parties in February 1937, the audience was about to request another reel of Rin-Tin-Tin when "just then, by a lucky coincidence (we thought), the projector ran a bearing and the performance stopped. Apart from work on former Missions this machine has already projected some 150,000 feet of film since we came to Lhasa, and must have given an incalculable amount of pleasure." Both Gould and Chapman commented on the ability of films to break down cultural barriers with

Tibetans. Chapman put this in the context of the mission's other intercultural endeavors: "Their great need for advice on political questions, the multifarious efforts of the Doctor, the entertainments provided by the cinema projector and the wireless loud-speaker had all done their share in breaking down what few barriers there are between the Tibetans and ourselves."[25] In his official report of the mission, Gould wrote of the positive political effects of showing films in Lhasa:

> There is nothing which Tibetans like better than to see themselves and their acquaintances in a frame or on the screen. Invitations to photograph families and monasteries were numerous, and monks were amongst the most ardent of our cinema clientele. A senior monk official recently suggested that it would cause much satisfaction in Lhasa if arrangements could be made to take a cinema record of holy Buddhist place[s] in Burma, India and Ceylon and to show [them] in Lhasa.[26]

In other words, one consequence of these Lhasa film parties was that "a senior monk" articulated a positive role for the cinema within the transnational Buddhist world. He apparently hoped to see the rest of the Buddhist world on film just as he had been able to see Lhasa's monasteries and holy ceremonies. This monk may even have seen the cinema as an agent in the global expansion of Buddhism. The dancing lamas of Everest in the 1920s may have gone to London out of similar "missionary" motives. These media enabled such monks to spread their message to other parts of the world as Buddhist monks had been doing for hundreds of years within Asia.

These Tibetan reactions and uses of film should warn against any suggestion that the cinema or other "Western" technologies were necessarily in conflict with Buddhism or Tibetan culture, or that they were only the medium of transmission for Western representations. Yet this "senior monk" developed his hopes for the potential of the cinema from his exposure to *British* films of Tibet. British film parties showed Tibetans the images of Tibet that the Tibetans wanted to see. Here the criteria employed by the British mission in selecting films "suitable for Tibetan audiences" remain undefined but their origins are perhaps

clearer: It was the consequence of the interplay of British assumptions and Tibetan expectations.

The images that Tibetan and British audiences were *not* shown are also significant. They were not shown images of everyday life in Tibet such as those that offended the Tibetans in the Everest film. Even the anodyne scenes of Tibetan farming in F. M. Bailey's films were absent. Consider the description of a scene from the 1930s called the "lama debate," filmed either by Basil Gould or, possibly, by Charles Bell: "The lama debate. Indian and Tibetan monks. Former brings a book to prove his point, becomes over excited, pulls his opponent's hat off and wrestles with him." In another description of a similar scene, two lamas present their disagreement to an arbitrator who rules in favor of the lama who brought a book to support his point of view.[27] The notes also suggest that this scene was cut from versions shown to British audiences.

It is unclear if Tibetans were ever shown films of Buddhist holy places in the rest of the world. It is clear, however, that the British thought the films they showed to Tibetans in the 1940s were examples of British propaganda. During 1942–43, Tibetans were shown newsreels on the Indian war effort, Churchill's visit to Canada and Iceland, *Victory in the Desert*, and other war newsreels of all kinds. In 1943, an official in the India Office recommended for showing in Afghanistan and Tibet a film called *London, 1942* because it "gives the right impression of British power and purpose." He also thought that a film on St. Paul's with its "religious flavour" was particularly suitable for Tibet. Another British mission to Tibet during World War II wrote: "There is no doubt that the cinema at Dekyilinka can be made into the most powerful of all our propaganda weapons. To paraphrase a famous saying 'give me the films, and I will produce the results.'"[28]

During World War II, the British were not the only people to make such films, and the Tibetans were not the only intended audience of such propaganda. A Nazi film, *Geheimnis Tibet* (Germany, 1942), was made from footage taken by Ernst Schäfer in Tibet in 1939. Another film, *The OSS Mission to Tibet* (U.S., 1943), recounted a U.S. diplomatic mission to Tibet to arrange the transport of military supplies. Propaganda about Tibet could also be directed at a variety of international

audiences. In 1944, after Gould showed his films on the installation of the Dalai Lama and on Bhutan to an audience in London consisting of officials from the Ministry of Information, the India Office, and the Foreign Office, one of these officials told Gould: "It would do the Americans a lot of good to see the film of Tibet; it should help to convince them that Tibet is not a part of China."[29]

The documentary moment in which Tibetans watched films of Tibet in Lhasa was ending in the late 1940s and had become a distant memory by the early 1950s. The Indian delegation to Tibet, which inherited the British mission in 1947, continued to show Indian and English films in Lhasa. Although Heinrich Harrer, the Austrian mountaineer who took refuge in Tibet during the war, had never before made a film, the young Dalai Lama gave Harrer a camera and asked him to film ice-skating and religious ceremonies and festivals: "As soon as it became known that I was filming and photographing under instructions from His Holiness I was not interrupted." The Dalai Lama also commissioned Harrer to build a cinema at Norbulingka, his summer palace. Harrer opened the cinema in 1950 with a documentary on the capitulation of Japan and his own film of Tibet. The Dalai Lama, who had practiced assembling the projector over the winter, then showed a film he had taken of the landscape of Lhasa, a long-distance shot of a caravan, and a closeup of his cook.[30] These were among the last such cinema shows in Lhasa before the Chinese invasion of Tibet later that year.

The legacy of these documentary films in Tibet from the 1920s to the 1950s is ambiguous. These films could offer visions of Tibet that were very different from prevailing myths in the West. Take, for example, the review in the *London Times* of Gould's 1936–37 Lhasa films:

> The film's great achievement was to present, however ramblingly, a true, vivid, and sufficiently comprehensive picture of life in Lhasa, stripping its cheerful citizency [*sic*] of mumbo-jumbo and investing them, from the beggar to the Minister of State, with a slightly embarrassed reality, more suggestive than any amount of sensational legend.
>
> It must be admitted that the Potala and the great monastery of Drepeing [*sic*] recalled, even while they transcended, the

architectural wishfulfillments of a Californian realtor which are to be seen in the film *Lost Horizon*. [31]

Although these films could prompt such criticisms of certain Western myths of Tibet, they could also reinforce others. The same review in the *Times* said that Gould's film gave the audience "an authentic glimpse of the nearest thing to Never-never-land extant in the modern world." Chapman's films of "devil dances" in 1936 may also not have seemed very different to his Western audiences from the Everest films and the "dancing lamas" of the 1920s.

Did the "Tibetan horizon" of these films merely become yet another "lost horizon"? These films did not portray Tibet as the Shangri-la of James Hilton's or Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon*. As more became known about Tibet, some qualities formerly associated with Tibet were transferred to "Shangri-la," a placeless utopia.[32] Yet to the extent that these documentary films have disappeared into the obscurity of film archives, this "Tibetan horizon" has indeed been lost for the last fifty years.[33] When Lowell Thomas, Sr., and Lowell Thomas, Jr., released *Out of This World: A Journey in Forbidden Tibet* (U.S., 1952), a travelogue of their journey in Tibet in the late 1940s, their commentary mentioned the Chinese invasion in 1950. When a film version of Heinrich Harrer's *Seven Years in Tibet* (U.K., 1956) was made in the mid-1950s, some reviewers regretted that the producers had not used documentary footage made by Harrer and others in Tibet, but instead relied on reconstructions of his adventures in a studio and on location in India.[34] In later years, documentary footage of the brutality of the invasion or the experience of exile understandably overshadowed the earlier documentary films made in Tibet.

Yet the "Tibetan horizon" of these documentaries has continued to influence Hollywood films about Tibet. Both Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Seven Years in Tibet* (U.S., 1997), based on Harrer's memoir, and Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* (U.S., 1997), based on the official biography of the Dalai Lama, reproduce Tibet from the 1930s to the 1950s with impressive fidelity.[35] While this essay is not the place for an extended review of these films, it is worth noting that both productions replicate the visual imagery of these documentaries. Both films reproduce

Gould's cinematic depiction of the ceremonies of the Lhasa year and the procession at the Dalai Lama's installation. They also recreate the Lhasa cinema, with the Dalai Lama viewing newsreels in his screening room. Both films also convey familiar myths. In *Seven Years in Tibet* the people of Lhasa casually offer pearls of wisdom about the harmony of Tibet in comparison to the West, and *Kundun* opens with a prologue extolling thousands of years of Tibetan nonviolence. *Kundun* breaks with certain Hollywood conventions and develops like a mandala from the viewpoint of the young Dalai Lama. But this very perspective ensures that ordinary Tibetans are glimpsed only fleetingly through the Dalai Lama's telescope, and the political intrigues of the regent are rendered incompletely and off-screen, just as such subjects were cut from the documentaries.

Yet *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Kundun* and the earlier documentary films resemble one another in a more profound sense: They are products of the intercultural exchange between Tibetans and Westerners. Many Tibetans served as advisors and appeared in the cast of the Hollywood films. Indeed, the Dalai Lama edited the script for Kundun with screen-writer Melissa Mathieson, who recalled that the Dalai Lama was "very concerned about the way some Tibetan characters and ceremonies might be presented, such as the Dalai Lama's court oracle. He knows how that might appear to Western audiences."[36] If British diplomats edited their documentary films to meet Tibetan expectations in the 1930s, Tibetans were able to influence Hollywood productions much more directly by the 1990s. Throughout the twentieth century, Tibetans have shaped the "virtual Tibet" presented in Western films.[37]

Thus, it would be tempting but misleading to view the large archive of documentary films as the repository of the "real" Tibet that existed before the Chinese invasion of the 1950s. If you want to see what Tibet looked like before 1950, with very few exceptions, you have to watch films made by British diplomats or by a small number of other Western visitors to Tibet. But what do these films represent? Are they Western fantasies or the "real" Tibet? They are neither one nor the other, but a combination of both. These films are examples of the intercultural construction of Tibet by Westerners and Tibetans in conversation with one another. Attempts to use these documentary films to locate an

"authentic" Tibet outside this process of dialogue would be misguided. These films represent not a "lost horizon," but a series of celluloid reflections of British and Tibetan images mirroring one another. The "Tibetan horizon" of these documentary films is, in a literal sense, the product of a double vision.

Appendix: Cinema in Lhasa, 1936

[December 4, 1936:] "The Yapshi Kung, with his wife and large family, came to dinner. These dinner parties, preceded and followed by film shows, are now a great feature of our life here.

"Tonight's party was typical.

"Our guests, having been invited for six o'clock, arrived an hour early. Gould and Richardson were drafting telegrams, Nepean and Dagg were engaged with wireless, Chapman was cutting a film and our only sitting room was festooned with innumerable strips of film.

"However, Norbhu held the fort until we were ready. The party consisted of the Duke, a lean, very short-sighted but very charming old aristocrat in his long yellow silk Shappe's robe; his wife, a shy rather florid woman wearing her hair looped up over a coral-studded triangular crown, with immense turquoise earrings, a charm box and a striped brown and red apron over an exquisite dragon-patterned Chinese silk dress; several grown up sons and daughters, one of the former being a favorite of the Regent; and four small children. After drinks—we find Tibetans drink Cinzano, rather reluctantly, or lemonade—we went downstairs for the first part of our performance. Here it was at once apparent that something unusual was afoot. It transpired that Norbhu had told three or four of the Potala monks that we were having a cinema show and that they could come. But about thirty monks, reinforced by as many soldiers from the neighbouring Norbhu Lingka barracks, had 'gatecrashed' the room; and while several monks had already taken the chairs reserved for our guests the rest of the crowd completely blocked all ways of approach. As soon as the monks had been forced to sit on the floor and our guests—though somewhat crowded—had taken their seats we started, as some of them had never before seen films, with something familiar to them, a film we have taken of the Potala and the Lhasa bazaar. This was followed by Rin-Tin-Tin in *The Night Cry.* This film has been a tremendous success in Lhasa; it is simple, moving, and of a subject with which they are familiar, nor does it leap from subject to subject as is the way of modern films. By the end of the fifth reel the women were weeping on each other's shoulders and imploring Rin-Tin-Tin to bite the villain's nose. After a Charlie Chaplin to restore their emotions we went upstairs to dinner while the uninvited monks were ejected.

"At dinner, to make the most of the small room, we sat, backs to the wall, on high Tibetan cushions while a variety of hors d'oeuvres-like dishes were served on the usual low Tibetan tables. Our guests proved less able to accustom themselves to foreign food than ourselves; but when Gould appeared with an armful of crackers the spirit of the party improved, and we were amazed to see a four-year old girl fearlessly holding a firework, while her brother, aged six, who had been told to behave exactly like his father, smoked a cigarette with apparent enjoyment.

"At eight o'clock bedecked with paper hats, we went downstairs to continue our film show. Color films of Tibet, more Charlie Chaplin, the Hendon Air Pageant 1929, color films of Sikkim, yet more reels of Tibet, what would they like for the last reel? After some deliberation perhaps they would like to see a Charlie Chaplin. And so at eleven o'clock the party ended, and after a final drink our guests mounted their ponies and rode home through the clear Tibetan night." (Source: "Lhasa Mission 1936, Diary of Events," Dec. 4, 1936, L/P&S/12/4193, British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, London.)

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Notes

1 Chapman, 1937: 122.

2 For a useful survey and typology of films about Tibet, which was itself prompted by a film festival, see Scofield, 1993. For other examples of such film festivals, see Harris, 1992; Emmons and Roy, 1992–93; Farrell, 1993.

3 For detailed information about these events, see Hansen, 1996.

4 See *Climbing Mount Everest* (1922) and *The Epic of Everest* (1924) viewing copies at the National Film and Television Archive, British Film Institute, London (hereafter NFTVA). For further discussion of Everest, see Hansen, 1996, and Ortner, 1999. For a discussion of relevant issues for documentary films, see Nichols, 1991; Loizos, 1993; Renov, 1993; Rabinowitz, 1994; Rony, 1996; and MacDougall, 1998.

5 Bailey to Hinks, November 18, 1924, Unsworth, 1991: 150, EE/24/2, Royal Geographical Society Archives, London (hereafter RGS), and L/P&S10/778, Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, London (hereafter OIOC). See also Almond, 1988; Lopez, 1995b, 1998.

6 Prime minister of Tibet to Bailey, April 12, 1925, L/P&S/10/778, OIOC; EE 27/6/13, RGS; and Unsworth, 1991: 51–52. Weir to Hinks, July 26, 1931, EE 44/5, RGS.

7 See Hansen, 1996. On the rumored coup attempt by Laden La in 1924, see McKay, 1997. On this period in general, see Goldstein, 1989 and Lamb, 1989.

8 See the rejected applications to film in Tibet of Lt.-Col. V. A. Haddick, 1930–31, L /P&S/12/4240; Mrs. Edwin Montagu, 1933, L/P&S/12/4271; and André Guibaut, 1935–37, L/P&S/12/4307, OIOC. William Montgomery McGovern's film of his 1922 journey in Tibet, exhibited under the titles of either *Mysterious Tibet* or *To Lhasa in Disguise* (UK, 1924), is now lost. See *Nation and Athenaeum* (12 Jan. 1924) and Low, 1971: 288.

9 See *Tibet, circa 1928,* NFTVA. This is the only one of Bailey's films that has a viewing copy. Charles Bell's films, which he made during trips to Tibet after his retirement, are not yet available for viewing at NFTVA. Weir's films remain in private hands. Williamson's films are in the Cambridge University Museum of Archeology and Anthropology and also have no viewing copies. Shotlists on the reel canisters in Cambridge suggest that Williamson's films contain material that is broadly similar to Gould's films. The Liverpool Museum holds some films of Tibet, but, according to Christina Baird, Curator of Oriental Collections, there is no comprehensive list of them. See also the useful appendix on "British Photographs and Films of Bhutan, 1864–1949," in Aris, 1994: 148–53.

10 I am very grateful to Luc Schaedler for sharing a copy of Filchner's film, *Möche Tänzer und Soldaten (im Reiche des Budda).* Some short Tibet films by Filchner are also at the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, Göttingen.

11 See Cutting, 1940 and his films *China and Tibet* (1929) and *To Lhasa and Shigatse* (1935) at the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

12 See *Tibet: Land of Isolation* (U.S., 1934), viewing copy at NFTVA.

13 Since filming was not among Chapman's official duties as enumerated by the India Office, Gould appears to have given Chapman these responsibilities of his own accord. Gould may have supplied Chapman with cameras that he bought in London. See Gould, 1957: 200 and Chapman, 1938b: 262–66.

14 Williamson, 1987: 206; see also 72, 104, 117–18. For an account of lantern slides, see White, 1909; and for an even earlier Tibetan account of seeing a peepshow in Calcutta, see Aris, 1995: 57. See also Bell, 1928: 263. Bailey showed a film of the king opening Parliament (Lhasa Diary, 30 July 1924, Mss Eur. F. 157/214).

15 Gould, 1957: 192, 206.

16 "Some taken by Gould in Kenya were very good, and should prove attractive to local visitors." Lhasa Mission 1936, Diary of Events [hereafter Lhasa Diary], 26 Aug. 1936. L/P&S/12/4193, OIOC. Chapman also showed film he had shot in Greenland. Chapman, 1938a: 250. For an example of the discussion elsewhere, see Orr, 1931: 238–44, 301–6, and the related discussion in Mackenzie, 1986: 68–95.

17 Chapman, 1938a: 247. On entering Gyantse, see Lhasa Diary, 12 Aug. 1936, L/P&S/12/4193, OIOC.

18 Chapman, 1937: 124; Chapman, 1938a: 274. Lhasa Diary, 24 Dec. 1936, L/P&S/12/4193, OIOC.

19 For Gould's comments on the installation, see the transcript of "Tape recording by Sir Basil Gould at a viewing held at the British Film Institute on Wednesday, 10th February, 1954, of his films featuring visits to Lhasa in 1936 and 1940, and to Bhutan in 1940," Related Material 1147, British Film Institute Library, London. On the amounts of film, see Chapman, 1938a, 245–46, and Chapman, 1937, 122.

20 For Chapman, see Sir Basil Gould Collection, Reel 1 (Lhasa: 1936); the other reels in this collection contain Gould's films from the 1940s. See NFTVA viewing copies. The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, holds some film shot by Spencer Chapman. Marina de Alarcón, curatorial assistant at the museum, reports that very little of it is of Tibet and that what exists is in very poor condition.

21 Barker, 1975: 132. See also Chapman, 1938a, 246.

22 Lhasa Mission Diary, 4 Dec. 1936, L/P&S/12/4193, OIOC; compare Chapman, 1938a: 247–52. For other film shows, see Dec. 7, 11, 15, 21, 29, 1936, and Jan. 1, 12, 25, 30, 1937. For assessments of Chaplin's popularity, see Chapman, 1937: 125; and Gould, 1957: 207.

23 Lhasa Diary, 27 Nov. 1936, L/P&S/12/4193, OIOC; and Chapman, 1938a: 252.

24 Lhasa Diary, 14 Sept. 1936, 17 Nov. 1936, L /P&S/12/4193, OIOC.

25 Lhasa Diary, 5 Feb. 1937, L /P&S/12/4193, OIOC, prints the figure 1,50,000, which might be read as 1,500,000 or 150,000; the latter is more likely. Chapman, 1938a: 324.

26 Basil Gould, Report on the Lhasa Mission, 30 April 1937, L/P&S/12/4197, OIOC.

27 See the descriptions of reel 6, and color films "(3). 100" in the annotated notes on Tibet films. These are filed with Basil Gould's notes but probably represent Charles Bell's notes on his films. Most of the annotations recommend cutting out material. See Related Material 1147, British Film Institute Library, London.

28 On war newsreels, see Lhasa Diaries, 20 Sept. 1942, 9 May 1943, and 13 June 1943; for "St. Pauls," see Rolfe to Todd, Film Section, British Council, [1943]; for "give me the films," see Lhasa Diary, 20 Sept. 1942; all in L /P&S/12/4605, OIOC. The British missions stayed at "Dekyilingka" outside Lhasa and showed their films there.

29 R. Peel to Gould, 30 Aug. 1944, L/P&S/12/4180, OIOC. *Geheimnis Tibet,* sometimes called *Enigma of Tibet* or *Secret of Tibet,* was produced for Heinrich Himmler. The *OSS Mission to Tibet* is sometimes catalogued as *Inside Tibet.* See the Motion Picture, Sound, and Video Branch, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

30 Harrer, 1953: 231, 246, 248–51. According to Hugh Richardson, personal communication, the films Harrer showed the Dalai Lama were given to him by the British, and later Indian, missions.

31 "Colour Film of Tibet. Mr. B. J. Gould's Journey," *Times,* 20 July 1937. See also "Devil Dances in Tibet. A Film in Colour," *Times,* 27 Nov. 1937.

32 See Bishop, 1989, and Lopez, 1998.

33 The NFTVA includes many reels but few viewing copies of films made in Tibet by F. M. Bailey, Charles Bell, James Guthrie, and George Sherriff.

34 For criticisms of the 1950s film of *Seven Years in Tibet,* see *Monthly Film Bulletin,* 24 (1957): 107.

35 Among the perceptive reviews, see Abramson, 1998: 8–12, and Norbu, 1998: 18–23.

36 *New York Times,* 7 Sept. 1997.

37 See Schell, 2000 for a discussion of the recent films and the influence of Buddhism in Hollywood.