

■ Consuming Tibet: Imperial Romance and the Wretched of the Holy Plateau

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Abstract

This essay tries to appropriate and actualize Said's critique of Orientalism and Mitchell's conception of the ideology of the imperial landscape in an attempt to show how the fantasy of Tibet as the Other was constructed by the narrative and visual technologies of imperialist ideology in the service of its own interests. The essay argues that both the mode of conquest and that of being conquered by the Tibetan landscape have misrepresented and distorted the nature of Tibet, thus actually reflecting the effect of imperialist hegemonic power over the indigenous people.

Between Western imperialism and the communists, Tibet has been consumed, becoming a "contact zone" in which contending powers and interests play against each other.

Keywords: Tibet, post-colonialism, power and representation, visibility and geo-politics, landscape and Eurocentrism

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In 1900, Arthur Conan Doyle, who created the myth of the famous detective Sherlock Holmes, perhaps due to his boredom with this cult figure, killed off his intelligent hero in a mortal combat with the arch-rival Professor Moriarty in the story of “The Final Problem.” According to Mr. Doyle’s original plot, during the final battle with Moriarty, Holmes plunged into the Reichenbach Falls and then disappeared. The death of Sherlock Holmes shocked readers. They asked, begged and even threatened Mr. Doyle to bring back Holmes, who was then the icon of the highest wisdom, intelligence, and talent in rescuing unfortunate people from the attacks of evil criminals. To meet the readers’ demand or to soothe the broken hearts of Holmes fans, perhaps, Doyle decided to resurrect Holmes in the story of “The Adventure of the Empty House,” published in *Collier’s Magazine* September 26, 1903. In his tale of how he survived the risk of death, Holmes told his dear sidekick Watson that during the three years of his absence he had disguised himself as a Norwegian explorer named Sigerson and gone to Tibet: “I traveled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhasa and spending some days with the head Llama” (Doyle 1903, in 1967: 337). It was in Tibet that Doyle had Holmes reborn. Hence, in the mind of the Western public, Tibet marked the last sanctuary for the hero, a place that exists outside time and space. As such, the return of Holmes exactly matched the popular Western fantasy of Tibet as a land of miracle, transcendence, promise, and spiritual wisdom.

Tibet as the Other of Imperial Fantasy

It is true that for centuries Tibet has been inscribed into the Western imagination as a cluster of sacred and magical spectacles such as the last Arcadia on earth, a land of a utopian Shangri-La, the Eternal Sanctuary, the Forbidden shrine, and so on and so forth. However, this fantastic codification of Tibet as the secret holy place, I would argue, does not reflect the disturbing identity of Tibet itself but the changing interests of Western imperialism. In other words, the sacred image of Tibet itself is invented by imperialist fantasy. Under the construction of the imperialist imaginary, Tibet finally emerged as a heterotopia, a no-man’s-land—a site of peace, simplicity, naturalness and the “Noble Savage”—standing between a pre-industrial but culturally sophisticated China and an already industrialized and urbanized West. As E. Candler described it, “We looked down on the great river that has been guarded from European eyes for nearly a century. In the heart of Tibet we had found Arcadia . . .” (227).

At the core of the imperialist fantasy of Tibet is the mythologization of its landscape—a romanticizing process of the cultural and visual representation of

Tibet's landmark, the Himalayas, invested with and mediated by imperialist ideology. From W. J. T. Mitchell's point of view, landscape is a particular historical formation reflecting internal politics and national ideology as well as an international, global tendency, and it is "intimately bound up with the discourses of imperialism" (5-9). According to Edward Said, in the process of recreating the Orient as an "absolute" silent Other, geography has played a crucial role in providing a coherent narrative for Western fantasies: "Geography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient. All the latent and unchanging characteristics of the Orient stood upon, were rooted in, its geography" (216). Thus, the secluded, unknown Tibetan landscapes provided a kind of *tabula rasa* for the fantasies of European imperialism, an empty space in which the European conventions of an ideal, romantic landscape—be it the beautiful, the sublime or the picturesque—were projected and inscribed. As a result, the proliferating literature of Tibet and accounts of Himalayan travel are characterized by the rhetoric of "grand prospects, solemn majestic views, picturesque scenes and glorious landscape" (Bishop 70). A short passage from G. White's description of Tibet might illustrate this particular rhetoric of landscape:

There is no possibility of conveying to the mind of the reader the gratification which we have experienced in some new burst of scenery, when, emerging from the somber labyrinths of a thick forest, we come suddenly upon one of those glorious landscapes which fill the whole soul with ecstasy. (177)

However, this romantic celebration of Tibetan landscape as a pristine natural beauty and an unspoiled paradise is most problematic because it reveals the ideology of pictorial colonization of the native landscape under the imperial gaze. Such imperial gaze is derived from the violent erasure of differences in its homogeneous representation of the Other, leading to the production of a kind of visual pleasure that fulfills most intensely the desire of its hegemonic unconscious. To decode how the fantasy of such a landscape was produced, consumed by the imperialist gaze, and particularly to reveal the mechanism that manipulates the production of this imperialist fantasy, Edward Said's critique of orientalism is most revealing for us to appropriate here.

In his seminal work *Orientalism* (1979), Said pointed out that the discursive formation of the Orient is the product of an overall operation of the power/knowledge created by Western imperialist ideology for serving its own interests, confirming its own self-identity, and representing the needs of a specifically European agenda. The imperialist invention of the Orient as a "significant Other" serves to establish Europe's superiority and right to rule. In Said's point of view, Orientalism is never a form of objective, disinterested knowledge, but is always wrapped up in the imperial ideology of domination and colonization. In this

case, the representation of the Orient is usually systematic *misrepresentation*, the usual means by which the conqueror naturalizes the conquered. As Said wrote, "Orientalism . . . is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which . . . there has been considerable material investment" (6).

It is true historically that the West's interest in Tibet was dominated by a strong imperialist will to unravel the mysteries of the Other, starting at the completion of the Western colonization of Africa, South America, and Asia by the end of the nineteenth century, and at the finish of the exploration of the world's great mountains such as the Alps, the Carpathians, the Rockies and the Andes. "Tibet," remarked Peter Fleming, "was the only region of the world to which access was all but impossible for white men and concerning which the small sum of existing knowledge served rather to tantalize than to instruct" (49). To explore the only remaining virgin land, the Himalayas, the British Royal Geographical Society played a catalyzing role; it offered funding, coordinating, training and publishing for the Himalayan mountaineering adventures by enforcing prevailing values for selecting, controlling and confirming the discourses of the explorations. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, a legitimate genre of Tibet travel writing was well-established, which can be witnessed in the inflation of the "material investment" of botany, geology, philology, ornithology, anthropology, archaeology, theology, folklore and travel narratives. Suddenly, Tibet became a site of imperial aspirations, dreams and power that not only helped to redraw the boundary of scientific knowledge but also to define the very identity of Western imperialism itself.

In the process of inventing Tibet as a sacred place, two important events transformed the West's imagination of Tibetan landscape: the publication of John Ruskin's five-volume work *Modern Painters* in 1854, and Charles Darwin's epochal book *The Origins of Species*, published in 1859. Ruskin's work, which emerged at the "Golden Age" of Alpine exploration, initiated a new aesthetics for understanding, perceiving and experiencing the mountain landscape, "systematizing the quintessence of advanced Victorian ideas about mountain landscape aesthetics" (Bishop 100).

Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection helped to change the popular attitude that the untrod higher mountains were a backward, bleak and horrible wilderness; on the contrary, as Darwin's theory holds, they belonged to the same evolutionary family with the so-called civilized West. In this light, Tibet and the Himalayas "suddenly became positioned on a trajectory that involved fantasies about sources and origins, missing links, evolutionary directions and goals, and about the survival of the fittest" (Bishop 118). At last, Tibet as the eternal sanctuary of a sacred landscape was invented for the West. From Lieuten-

ant George White's peculiar account of his experience in crossing the threshold of the Himalayas, an aesthetic shift in observing the landscape from the negative view to the ideal view can be explicitly discerned:

The view of the Himalayas from a spot in the vicinity of Saharanpore, is of that dreamy, poetical description, which, though full of beauty, presents little that is definite . . . the pyramidal snow-capped heights, which seem to lift themselves into another world, crowning the whole with almost awful majesty. From this site, the mountain ranges have all the indistinctness which belongs to the land of fairy, and which, leaving the imagination to luxuriate in its most fanciful creations, lends enchantment to the scene. The pure dazzling whiteness of the regions of eternal snow gives occasionally so cloud-like an appearance to the towering summits, as to induce the belief that they form a part of the heaven to which they aspire. (White 1825 in 1982: 94)

White's perspective of the Himalayan landscape precisely reflects the typical Ruskinian conception of the landscape characterized by noble sublimity, sinless beauty, and uplifting perfection that in the final analysis celebrates the purity, dignity and glory of morality and spirituality.

In the process of the imperialist invention of Tibet as the sacred landscape, two particular modes of representation can be thus identified: the mode of conquering Tibet and that of being conquered by Tibet. These two modes can be found in the two works depicting Tibet—the first, in Swedish explorer Sven Hedin's travel narrative *A Conquest of Tibet*, published in 1934; the second, in British novelist James Hilton's fiction *Lost Horizon* in 1933. As I will show in the following analysis, the two modes, though appearing different on the surface, are ideologically based on a shared fantasy that seeks to homogenize the difference of the Other under the power of imperial gaze.

Logic of Conquest

Conquest is an operation of particular hegemonic power that takes over the territory of the other, that appropriates the other's property as its own, and that makes the other submissive to its norms and values. To conquer the Other is the dominant ideology of Western imperialism that has succeeded in its global expansion. The most obvious form of conquering is carried out by force such as the imperialist venture led by the British colonel Francis Edward Younghusband who invaded Tibet and conquered the heart of the mysterious Lhasa in 1904. However, there is another form of conquest which is more subtle, more surreptitious, and thus needs careful investigation to reveal its masked nature. In this case, the conquest is not deployed by force but by ideological, cultural

and aesthetical codes, functioning to naturalize the foreign wonders into familiar conventions.

Seven Hedin's account of his travel in Tibet represents this kind of logic of conquest. Seven Hedin, author of several travel books about Central Asia, including *Across The Gobi Desert*, *Jehol: City of Emperors and Riddles of the Gobi Desert*, had, when young, read "the accounts of the immortal Marco Polo," devoured "Abbe Huc's and Prshevalsky's descriptions of journeys in Tibet," and "dreamed about the opportunity of seeing that country" (*A Conquest of Tibet* 12). His expedition to Tibet, the unknown "Forbidden Land," began with a strong consciousness of conquest: "I felt like a Tamerlane on an expedition to conquer new empires" (15). But first of all, to conquer, one needs to create a greater, nobler and more majestic rivalry, a sacred land worthy of conquering, so that its final victory can be honorably celebrated. In other words, to create an ideal landscape, an Arcadia, is not to embrace it, but to conquer it: to create is to destroy. So at the very beginning of Hedin's travel narrative, he created a fantastic ideal mountain landscape that was inaccessible and sealed off from the rest of the world. As he wrote:

In the heart of Asia the snow-crowned peaks of the highest mountains area on earth rise toward sun and stars. It is known as Tibet or the "Snow-land." Himalaya, "The Abode of Winter," forms a rampart at the southern boundary, and also fixes the northern limit to India's eternal summer. From that part of Central Asia which is covered by the suffocating sand deserts of Chinese Turkestan, Tibet is separated by the Kuen-lun gigantic mountain system. The interior of Tibet is also filled with mighty mountain chains, almost without exception ranging eastward and westward. . . . The forbidding mountains have provided this land with an unyielding defense. For this reason Tibet has remained one of the least known and most inaccessible sections of the earth even up to our day. (11)

On the surface this description sounds like a general geographical report, a semi-scientific field work, but what is hidden in it is precisely the creation of a fantasized Tibet as the most majestic place existing outside time and space, a place which is most difficult to reach, as he later admits, "I had learned that Tibet is one of the most difficult countries on earth to conquer for purposes of human research and knowledge" (71). Such fantasy-making provokes the desire to explore and conquer this forbidden land: "With clenched teeth, we were now ready to defy all obstacles that Nature had raised in our way (72).

Once an ideal land was constructed, the next task was to endow its landscape with all the qualities that match its fantasy-making desire so as to foreground the values of the subsequent conquering. First, Tibet is claimed to preserve "the fairy-like, gorgeous scenery" (335); or "No scenery on earth can rival this in magnificent beauty" (333). Tibet, most significantly, has never been trodden by any

white man: "In the beginning of August we started our march to the unknown. Every day presented us with a new stretch of land, upon which no white man had ever before set his foot" (18). Hence, Tibet is a virgin land with all its natural beauty awaiting to be conquered by the explorer. Secondly, the landscape is pristine, pure, holy, and picturesque, arousing a kind of coherent visual pleasure for the imperial eyes. Hedin observed:

In this thin, clean air the mountains were decorated in pure, changing colors. . . . On peaks and crests the fields of snow expanded in dazzling white and in the center of the depressions the lakes glittered like turquoises in a sea of stone and gravel. In the magnificent surroundings one experiences the same attunement to worship as in entering a cathedral. (28)

Traveling in this fantastic landscape surrounded by "the crystal-clear water" and "the eternally snow-clad mountains," the explorer achieved a kind of thrilling experience that he couldn't help yelling out: "It was a solemn and wonderful experience to stand on this spot of the earth!" (332). Thirdly, the wilderness in Tibetan landscape opens up a kind of natural beauty and noble sublimity that produces mysterious powers and passions. In Hedin's point of view, "The wilderness has its secrets. Spirits soar over the mountain of Tibet" (74). Rather than being "naked, sterile, desolate," bleak and dreary, for Hedin, "[A] wild life thrives here, which in beauty and power corresponds to the grandeur of the landscape" (28). Especially, one can enjoy a "pure light" that possesses a spectacular luminosity in Tibet. According to Ruskin, the purity of light is intimately related to "a type of sinlessness" in nature (2: 230). The luxuriant light in Tibet often makes one feel dreamlike, even hallucinatory:

The peaks are shaped like pyramids and cupolas with shining caps of eternal snow and in the valleys between the mountains, blue and green glaciers extend their armors of ice toward the lake. The sky is turquoise blue; not even the slightest breeze ruffles the lake, whose smooth surface reflects the fantastic contours and brilliant colors of the mountains. . . . The sinking sun resembled a ball of glittering gold. Scarlet skies were driving eastward. As if illuminated from within, the mountains glowed like rubies. (Hedin 195-96)

Hedin was so intoxicated with this strong pure light and colors that he felt "gliding along in a landscape of dreams" (195). Perhaps due to the influence of Romantic landscape aesthetics opened up by John Ruskin, Hedin showed a very subtle appreciation of light and color. The following passage shows his sensitivity to particular changes in the light:

The night was advancing. There was light over the mountains in the east. Light white clouds became rosy in color and their reflections on the smooth surface of the water resembled those gardens. Gurlas's crown glowed in the first rays of the rising sun, while the snow-clad sides of the mountain still were in the shadows of the earth. (335)

This fascination with the beauty and sublimity of light and color foregrounds the unreal experience of the Tibetan wilderness; in so doing, Tibet as a transparent Other was represented. As Bishop aptly pointed out, “The celebration of uncanny luminosity and unearthly colors reinforced Tibetan Otherness, its place above the demands and stresses of the modern world, outside space and time” (163).

From the above, we can see that Hedin’s representation of Tibet masks imperialist ideology. The derivative Tibetan landscape under the imperial gaze is always subject to the self-interests of the conqueror, to the fulfillment of the imperialist’s dream of conquering. As Hedin said to himself, “I was dreaming of new conquest and strange adventures. My life had been wonderful, but still was not closed. Here was Tibet, a land full of mystery and riddles!” (173). However, the conquering does not encounter any resistance in Tibet because there is nothing to be conquered there; the ideal Tibet does not exist but is invented by a privileged fantasy. Thus the operation of conquest is a struggle against itself; what happened in the final analysis is that the victor is also the victim at the same time.

Shangri-La: Elegy of Utopia

When Tibet was first discovered and opened to Western explorers, the savage splendor and natural sublimity of its mountain landscape shocked them, even frightened them. In Hedin’s travel narrative, we can see that although he fantasized about Tibet as an ideal land, an absolute Other that he must conquer, when he looked at the majestic mountain landscapes, he felt detached, dizzy, and his vision was filled with great awe and fear. But once Tibet was made known to the West, because of its relative isolation and peripheral place, it became a free space for the unrestrained imagination, producing yet another different form of representing Tibet: Tibet as a utopia free of fear, terror and contradiction that has obsessed the West.

These two modes of conquest marked the fundamental shift toward landscape in Western fantasization of the Other. As Michael Le Bris pointed out, “A whole age that was coming to an end shunned mountains because they were horrible, while the . . . [next] sought out their ravines and waterfalls precisely in order to be carried away by their thrilling horror” (24). In this context, James Hilton’s novel *Lost Horizon* (1933) represents the model of being carried away, or conquered by Tibet.¹

¹ According to Orville Schell, *Lost Horizon* was the first novel published in paperback in 1939 by

The plot of the story is quite simple. Conway, the main character of the novel, a onetime student at Oxford university, mountaineer of the Alps, veteran of the First World War and noted explorer of China, together with another three passengers embarking on a cabin machine to withdraw from Peshawur, landed in the Himalayan mountains, a valley called Karakal, which in the native language means “Blue Moon.” There they discovered a wonderful lamasery named “Shangri-La” which was not marked on any maps (116). During his stay in Shangri-La, Conway, after several long meetings and esoteric conversations with the High Lama who was then already more than one hundred years old, underwent a dramatic spiritual initiation and was identified as the reincarnation of the High Lama. Thus, this novel is explicitly a narrative of Conway’s initiatory experience, his spiritual quest, his pilgrimage, and his grand tour of Shangri-La—a place of utopia. However, in the process of Conway’s initiation and spiritual journey in Shangri-La, landscape plays a significant role in guiding the spectator’s fantasy.

First, Shangri-La was imagined as the *axis mundi*, the sacred center of the world—“an extraordinary place—a lost valley in the midst of unexplored mountains” (249), a secluded world protected from the outside world by gigantic mountain walls. This is what Conway described:

Hardly less an enticement was the downward prospect, for the mountain wall continued to drop, nearly perpendicularly, into a cleft that could only have been the result of some cataclysm in the far past. The floor of the valley, hazily distant, welcomed the eye with greenness; sheltered from winds, and surveyed rather than dominated by the lamasery, it looked to Conway a delightfully favored place, though if it were inhabited its community must be completely isolated by the lofty and sheerly unscalable ranges on the further side. (82)

What characterized this *axis mundi* was tranquillity, harmony and peacefulness: “all was in deep calm. In a moonless sky the stars were lit to the full, and a pale blue sheen lay upon the dome of Karakal” (152). For Conway, “Shangri-La was always tranquil, yet always a hive of unpursuing occupations” (227). Conway was intoxicated in this serene world of paradise which was “pacified rather than dominated by its single tremendous idea” (226).

In the eyes of Conway, the serene purpose of Shangri-La could transcend all color and race prejudice but also “embrace an infinitude of odd and apparently trivial employments” (228). The air was pure, clean, and uncontaminated; the atmosphere was “pleasantly warm even out of the sun” (129):

Ian Ballantine. Frank Capra made a successful movie in 1937 which won two Academy awards (Art Design and Editing). A musical remake of the film was produced in 1973.

That thin air had a dream-like texture, matching the porcelain-blue of the sky; with every breath and every glance he took in a deep anesthetizing tranquility. (83)

Besides, Shangri-La was a land abundantly provided with everything necessary for life:

For the valley was nothing less than an enclosed paradise of amazing fertility, in which the vertical difference of a few thousand feet spanned the whole gulf between temperate and tropical. Crops of unusual diversity grew in profusion and contiguity, with not an inch of ground untended. (129)

After Conway met with the High Lama and listened to his teachings, he came to see that Shangri-La actually preserved the source of wisdom, the elixir of youth and new hopes for the world's future. He finally found contentment and felt at home in Shangri-La, and achieved what the High Lama revealed to him: "calmness and profundity, ripeness and wisdom, and the clear enchantment of memory" as well as the real meaning of Time—"that rare and lovely gift that your Western countries have lost the more they pursued it" (186). Conway was totally conquered and carried away by the majestic power and beauty of Shangri-La. The initiation of Conway was subtly reflected in his changing attitudes toward the landscape in Shangri-La; in other words, Conway's grand tour of the mystic kingdom also brought about his final enlightenment concerning the truth of Shangri-La.

Conway's experience of the landscape underwent a fundamental shift from what John Ruskin called "mountain gloom" to "mountain glory" (Vol. IV, 309-74), i.e., from the strength and immensity of the mountain that frighten and provoke horror—the "sadness of the hills" (327)—to the sublimity, superb beauty of the mountain that purifies, and produces the power of anima, the "healthily mountainous" (337). At the very beginning when the plane was flying above the Himalayas, Conway gazed out at the mountains below, he was frightened by the majestic ranges and suddenly felt an unspeakable horror. He was shocked by the monstrous vast wilderness and showed a strong distaste for it:

The surrounding sky had cleared completely, and in the light of late afternoon there came to him a vision which, for the instant, snatched the remaining breath out of his lungs. Far away, at the very limit of distance, lay range upon range of snow-peaks, festooned with glaciers, and floating, in appearance, upon vast veils of cloud. They compassed the whole arc of the circle, merging towards the west in a horizon that was fierce, almost garish in coloring, like an impressionist back-drop done by some half-mad genius. . . . Conway was not apt to be easily impressed, and as a rule he did not care for views, especially the famous ones. . . . To watch the sunrise upon Everest, he found the highest mountain in the world a definite disappointment. But this fearsome spectacle beyond the window pane was of different caliber; it had no air of posing

to be admired. There was something raw and monstrous about those uncompromising ice-cliffs, and a certain sublime impertinence in approaching them thus. (46-47)

When he continued to stare at the superb mountain, he felt extremely detached, “distant, inaccessible,” and “remote,” and the mountains showed him “a chill gleam,” a “sinister,” “unhumanized,” and “most inhospitable” face (52-53). Before entering Shangri-La, though his attention was always kept on the awe-inspiring “virgin splendors” of the majestic landscape, Conway still considered the dazzling Karakal “the most terrifying mountainscape in the world” (81). However, after his entering into Shangri-La, Conway’s perspective of looking at the mountain landscape was commanded gradually by his initiatory journey in it, and that gave rise to a dramatic change of his point of view of experiencing the landscape. Rather than feeling detached from the gigantic mountain, Conway felt quite “a welcome familiarity” (86): “He was gazing upward to the gleaming pyramid of Karakal. . . . Indeed, as Conway continued to gaze, a deeper repose overspread him, as if the spectacle were as much for the mind as for the eye” (97), and “Shangri-La was lovely then, touched with the mystery that lies at the core of all loveliness. The air was cold and still; the mighty spire of Karakal looked nearer, much nearer than by daylight” (122). Shangri-La appeared to him no longer inhospitable, monstrous and wild; on the contrary, he felt himself quite at home there: “He felt an extraordinary sense of physical and mental settlement. It was perfectly true; he just rather liked being at Shangri-La. Its atmosphere soothed while its mystery stimulated, and the total sensation was agreeable” (151).

The most dramatic moment, which totally transformed Conway after several long talks with the High Lama, is marked by a corresponding vision of the magical landscape. In other words, the moment when he reached his final initiation was the moment when he was totally conquered by the power of Shangri-La. After his surrendering to the power of the High Lama—“but suddenly a deep impulse seized him, and he did what he had never done to any man before; he knelt, and hardly knew why he did it” (191-92)—Conway has a new view of his surroundings in Shangri-La:

Never had Shangri-La offered more concentrated loveliness to his eyes; the valley lay imaged over the edge of the cliff, and the image was of a deep unrippled pool that matched the peace of his own thoughts. (192)

His initiatory bliss became more intense after the High Lama recognized him as his reincarnation: “I have waited for you, my son, for quite a long time. I have sat in this room and seen the faces of new-comers, I have looked into their eyes and heard their voices, and always in hope that some day I might find you” (236). He

found himself part of the landscape: “He often felt a living invasion of a deep spiritual emotion, as if Shangri-La were indeed a living essence, distilled from the magic of the ages and miraculously preserved against time and death” (205). In Conway’s spiritual quest, Shangri-La took on a new face: the shrine of anima that cast an irresistible spell over him, one in which one could achieve Nirvana:

As the days and weeks passed he began to feel an ache of contentment uniting mind and body. . . . He was falling under the spell. Blue Moon had taken him, and there was no escape. The mountains gleamed around in a hedge of inaccessible purity, from which his eyes fell dazzled to the green depths of the valley; the whole picture was incomparable. (213-14)

Thus Shangri-La offered Conway the hope and cure for his identity crisis, which finally led to his salvation from spiritual disillusionment with Western culture. Shangri-La “proved the perfect antidote to a gathering global fear of the collapse of the civilized world” (Orville 242). Since Conway had a traumatic experience of the loss of value in the First World War, and his despair in the post-war situation of spiritual emptiness, his pilgrimage in Tibet provided him with all the power of wisdom that could save him from his post-war sense of loss. As Michael Le Bris, in his study of the Westerner’s fantasy of the East in the Romantic Era, pointed out:

That Elsewhere, that yearned-for realm where it was supposed that a man might get rid of the burden of self, that land outside space and time, thought of as being at once a place of wandering and a place of homecoming. (161)

Conway’s fantastic journey in Shangri-La exactly illustrates the imaginary creation for the West of a safe and timeless Utopia in the East.

Seen in this light, the mythologizing of Tibet does not reflect the reality of Tibet but the profound crisis of values haunting the West (seen in the Great Depression and rise of Nazism). Therefore, Tibet, believed to rise above the global catastrophe, was not only linked to Western identity, but also to the survival and continuation of world civilization and even of humanity itself. James Hilton’s Shangri-La was the chief symbol of this fantasizing of Tibet. At the final stage of Conway’s initiation, the High Lama revealed for Conway his vision of what would happen to the world: the coming of an unprecedented storm called the Dark Ages would destroy the whole world, “every flower of culture” and “all human things.” No arms, no authority, and no science in the world could prevent it from happening, but Shangri-La could alone offer a way out:

The Dark Ages that are to come will cover the whole world in a single pall; there will be neither escape nor sanctuary, save such as are too secret to be found or too humble to be noticed. And Shangri-La may hope to be both of these. (237)

Only Shangri-La could offer the hope and spiritual wisdom needed in the impending world crisis. In the High Lama's apocalyptic prophecy, it is only in Shangri-La that the seeds for the world's future would be preserved and nourished:

I see, at a distance, a new world stirring in the ruins, stirring clumsily but in hopefulness, seeking its lost and legendary treasures. And they will all be here, my son, hidden behind the mountains in the valley of Blue Moon, preserved as by miracle for a new Renaissance. . . . (238)

Ironically, the High Lama's vision proved true. The subsequent Second World War and the explosion of the atomic bomb in Japan were dark storms that almost destroyed the whole world. Yet what emerged from the ruins was not a New World but a Cold War world order that not only brought about more disasters to the human world but also destroyed Shangri-La, the Blue Moon in which the last seed of hope for the future was believed to be preserved, when in 1950 the Red Army marched into Tibet, occupied the *axis mundi*, Lhasa and the Potala, and drove away the Anima-God the Dalai Lama, to exile in India. Herein lies the biggest irony of the High Lama's vision and the West's fantasy of Tibet. The feeling of this irony prevailing in the western psyche was melancholic, elegiac, tragic, and even nostalgic but it is true, and mostly real.

So far, we have discussed two forms of representing Tibet in the Western imagination: literally conquering Tibet and being figuratively conquered by Tibet. Both of these forms are the fantastic constructions of Tibet as the Other. The first creates Tibet as a sacred place in order to conquer it while the latter creates Tibet as a land of utopia so as to be conquered by it. However, they share a single ideological ground in that their fantasy *misrepresents* Tibet. In Roland Barthes's point of view, the creation of any myth is not to hide anything, but "its function is to distort, not to make disappear" (121). From the fantasy of conquering to that of being conquered, a fundamental shift of representing Tibet took place, namely, Tibet from *a* place transformed to *the* place or *non-place* (as the Greek word "U-topia" indicates).

To conquer Tibet is to take it as a physical and geographical place, especially an unknown place so as to discover it and explore its mystery; to fantasize Tibet into a utopia of hope, promise and spiritual salvation that makes one surrender is to construct it as the place that only exists outside time and space. Thus its cultural and landscape identity in the real world have to be distorted in order to maintain its symbolic meaning. As Peter Bishop pointed out, "Tibet was not just *any* place, not just *one* among many within the Western global imagination. For a few years at the turn of the century it became *the* place. . . . The acclaim given to explorers of Tibet and Central Asia was exceptional; it was as if Tibet touched some fundamental surface of the Era's imagination" (143; original italics).

Certainly, the fantasy of Tibet as the only sacred place, on the one hand, touches its own identity crisis of Western culture, and on the other hand, touches the ideology of the imperialist gaze, that is, its erasure of the cultural differences and the Other by its master narrative of imperialism.

Recreating Tibet in Post-Shangri-La Hollywood

Ever since Tibet was discovered and made known to the West, the image of Tibet has been inscribed not only in literary but also in visual representations. Explorers of Tibet have tried to capture it visually, and the visual/pictorial representation of Tibet is a fundamental factor in constructing the visual literacy of Tibet and the fantasy of its landscape. However, I would argue that the visual discourse of Tibet produced by the imperial gaze is always problematic, and thus must be called into question. Because no visual narrative is free of values and conventions, visual representation of culture is mediated by networks of ideology.

In the imperial gaze of Tibet (and the Orient), a series of scopic binary oppositions have been reduced: the one who sees and the one who is seen; the perceiving subject and the perceived object; the primary eye and the secondary/derivative eye; the commanding viewer and the commanded one. The imperial gaze is always the one who sees, views, and commands, exerting hegemonic power over the one who is viewed as the derivative object of desire. As a result, all natural and cultural differences of the Other were tailored to the visual pleasure of imperial eyes. Tibetan landscape, on the one hand, became a visual display for the projection of imperial landscape aesthetics—the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque—and on the other, disrupted the visual pleasure of imperialist power deriving from the coherence of its visual narrative, thus reformulating its landscape aesthetics.

As Western imperialism was a global phenomenon, its conquest went beyond the British Empire and its literary representation was not limited in English novels. Yet, despite Edward Said's argument that "only England had an overseas empire that sustained and protected itself over such an area, for such a long time, with envied eminence" (697), the liminal boundary that separates the English novel with that of other imperialist countries is in no regard rigid. American imperialist attitude emerged after the 1898 Spanish-American War and placed areas (Hawaii, the Philippines) under American suzerainty—or, perhaps euphemistically, supervision. American contact with Tibet was first established in 1942 through a correspondence from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the

Dalai Lama on July 3rd, 1942. Aside from introducing the two emissaries he had sent with the letter, FDR discusses the current state of world affairs: “As you know, the people of the United States, in association with those of twenty-seven other countries, are now engaged in a war which has been thrust upon the world by nations bent on conquest who are intent on destroying freedom of thought, of religion, and of action everywhere” (113). The conflation of American-Tibetan politics with war is symbolically constructed within the theatre of the Second World War where FDR’s scheduled bombing raids over Tokyo allegedly originated from “Shangri-La”—the utopia imagined in James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*. Yet while American political entanglement with the “roof of the world,” Tibet, began in 1942 and was symbolically referenced during the Tokyo bombing raids, American culture addressed the issue of Tibet with the 1937 release of Frank Capra’s film version of *Lost Horizon*.

Predating American political contact with Tibet by five years, the film interestingly depicts a Western view of Tibet *as* Shangri-La that departs rather noticeably from Hilton’s novel. The construction of this Tibet, however, occurs within the mythical landscape of the imagined, the dream world, so to speak, of the unknown; it is the consummation of the American romance with images and travel spectacle, of the scopic eye that gleans little insight into the culture itself, and it is, ultimately, a mirror of the self in its construction of a fantastic space outside the realm of existence. Within Edward Said’s statement that “[t]o think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate or depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land” (698) resonates the American consumption of the “image” of Tibet. The American filmic treatment of Tibet has neither grounded itself on the political handling of Tibet nor on the landscapes that compose the Tibetan plane—American filmic consumption of the Tibetan image has consistently maintained the trope of prolonged life, immortality, or, in Freudian terms, the trope that “the organism wishes only to die in its own fashion” (*Brooks* 290). Since Arthur Conan Doyle’s resurrection of Sherlock Holmes, the mythos of Tibet has operated as a veritable philosopher’s stone or fountain of youth for the psyche of the dream world. Drawing on Freud’s *thanatos* drive, Tibet functions as a space in which the organism not only eludes death but approaches the end through means of its own choosing. The visual, scopic dimensions of Tibet are limited by the physical and political realities of modern politics and, rather than being depicted in American film, are substituted with mythical/spiritual symbolism. Essayist Dorothy Hale comments that “Geography, in other words, has no point of view” (655). Tibet is no exception. The limited American knowledge and political relationship with Tibet before 1942 and the subsequent acquisition of Tibet by the People’s Republic of China

has left the American eye with a ghost country, erected by and through the image of America itself.

Frank Capra's 1937 release of *Lost Horizon* can be seen as a re-creation more so than a reworking of the original Shangri-la. Whereas Hilton's Shangri-La could be read as a less than reputable society, the Shangri-La of the 1937 film loses the novel's insinuations of drug culture, geriatric hegemony, and, to a lesser extent, inescapable imprisonment. Tomoko Masuzawa, in her work *From Empire to Utopia: The Effacement of Colonial Markings in Lost Horizon* locates the negative aspects of Hilton's Shangri-La. She writes, "Shrouded in secrecy, it is a scheming mini-empire comprising a veritable gerontocracy far more extreme than Deng Xiaoping's China, a fantastic economic base in a clandestine gold trade, and an upper-crust population who relies for their well-being on altogether unproductive occupations beginning with, basically, doing nothing, not going anywhere, practicing yoga, and taking unidentified drugs" (544). The transformation of Shangri-La from the seedy establishment of the novel into the lavish utopia of the film occurs through a subtle alteration of context. The film opens with narration via an open storybook. Rather than construct the film based on the novel, the film opts to base its apotheosis on myth and fantasy. The storybook opening operates to recall the source of the work as well as to pervert it and distort it—to change the novel into fable. This technique is, furthermore, seen throughout American dealings with Tibet in film and is echoed in the 1994 film *Little Buddha* (Bertolucci) and the 2003 *Bulletproof Monk* (Hunter) both of which opt for a visible mythical book/scroll in the *mise-en-scène* of the film. "What distinguishes the novel from the story (and from the epic in the narrower sense)," writes theorist Walter Benjamin, "is its essential dependence on the book" (87). American filmic treatment of Tibet concentrates on the removal of the physical book as the precursor to focusing on the landscape within which the film occurs and, since Tibet itself is either fabricated or inaccessible on the screen, it is the mythologized image of Tibet that emerges in the filmic context.

Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* alters the seedy, "utopian" society of drug-induced stupor within the umbrage of Karakal ("Blue Moon") to an Elysian paradise, brimming with uninhibited happiness and prosperity, and, ironically, destined to fall into the hands of the main character Robert (Hugh in the novel) Conway. The relevant political status of the main character is thrown into question; whereas in the novel he is a lowly consul, the film depicts him as the next Foreign Secretary. The change can partially be attributed to the American desire for celebrity within the film. Yet this change is also crucial in highlighting the illusory nature of Shangri-La. When Chang tells Conway in the film, "Shangri-La is Father Perrault," a metonymic relationship is established between the Western world

and the Eastern utopia of Shangri-La; Shangri-La is a European construct, despite its Tibetan landscape. The metaphor, in fact, extends further. Conway's love in the film is a young English girl named Sondra (a fractured version of the novel's Lo-Tsen who is also present in the film as Maria, a Russian girl). Sondra reveals that she specifically requested Conway's presence at Shangri-La after reading one of his books. In the novel Conway's arrival in Shangri-La (and the immediate development of his relationship with the High Lama) was by chance but the machinations that play into his arrival at Shangri-La in the film are physically controlled by Sondra, Chang, and the High Lama. Sondra ruminates to Conway: "Perhaps you've always been a part of Shangri-La without knowing it." Her association of Conway with Shangri-La is telling not only of the metonymic relationship that was established between Father Perrault and Tibet (extended to Conway), but, through juxtaposition, also of the apparent establishment of a relationship between Conway's Shangri-La and the book by which Conway—for Shangri-La—comes to exist. If for Benjamin the distance between the story/epic and the novel is the physical book itself, then the film locates Conway outside of the epic through his association with the novel since in the film the signifier of the novel is no longer Shangri-La (as it was in Hilton's version) but Conway himself, the surrogate of the American eye.

The alignment of the American perspective with the physical book and of Shangri-La with the story/epic inverts the paradigm of Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, wherein Shangri-La was the untouchable, fantastic location that was feasible only within the novel itself. The visualization of Shangri-La in Capra's *Lost Horizon* places the mountain retreat into the epic plane through its disassociation with the utopia of the novel. But Shangri-La is not the only fictional city of *Lost Horizon*—although many incorrectly assume it is—rather, it exists contrapuntally to Capra's re-imagined Baskul, relocated into the heart of a Chinese rebellion. The political reasons behind this change are manifold. The 1937 film, *Lost Horizon*, was released amidst jockeying for power between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party—the rebellion within Baskul (China) is not only easily identifiable as these rebellions, but it's also sidled with macabre insinuations of Communism and the not-yet-forgotten first Red Scare. If Shangri-La is indeed a Freudian escape from death, then it also functions as the inverse of the fictional Baskul in which Conway and company flee for their lives from the spread of Communism. Ironically, however, there are strong insinuations of Communism that exist within supposedly "utopian" communities. Additionally, in reading Shangri-La Tomoko Masuzawa writes, "Shangri-La embodies the ideals of the eighteenth-century European imagination whose fantasies included appreciative and appropriative musings about what was then considered to be the classical

culture of the Orient. . .” (556). The attempt to preserve the eighteenth century in the wake of World War I, the stirrings of international communism, and the beginnings of World War II requires a location that exists *sans* international community. The positioning of Baskul as a war-torn Chinese city is telling, furthermore, in the casting of both Chang (H. B. Warner) and Sondra/Maria (derived from Lo-Tsen); the traces of Chinese leadership in Shangri-La are replaced by Caucasian roles. Shangri-La is not only an escape from death for its elderly prisoners, but it is a museum preserving a type of civilization soon to be extinct. Tomoko Masuzawa notes that “Theodor Adorno conjured up the word association of *museum* and *mausoleum* and offered us the first analytic insight into that ‘unpleasant overtone’ we hear in the word *museumlike* (*museal*)” (557). The binary established between the inner turmoil of Baskul and the tranquility of Shangri-La accents the outlandish state of decay within the American filmic depiction of Shangri-La; what *Lost Horizon* offers the American viewer is not an indefinite utopia but rather a retreat from the contemporary—an attempt to stave off the wars, rebellions, and advent of communism occurring in the international world. By transferring the concept of the novel from Shangri-La to Conway (by means of Conway’s book), Capra delineates Shangri-La’s escape from the connotations of the novel—the new—and separates the utopia from contemporary society.

Certain inconsistencies which happen to the character of Robert Conway have put British ascendancy into question, for Robert Conway was previously asserted to function as the American scopic eyepiece into Shangri-La. While such a statement does deserve merit and consideration, the argument is mitigated by a few defining factors. Frank Capra’s casting of Ronald Colman as Robert Conway is interesting as Colman, originally from England himself, became a leading actor in American films—this recasting of an English/American actor to play the role of an English foreign secretary under the eye of the American people is telling of the role Capra wished for Conway to play. Conway’s name was also changed from Hugh in Hilton’s version to Robert, a more easily identifiable name to the American people. There may be another, lesser known justification for the portrayal of American viewpoints within the leading British role. In Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*, Hugh Conway dictates his story to his eager classmate aboard a vessel bound for San Francisco; yet, realizing with clarity the story he has just recounted, Conway escapes from the vessel and never arrives in San Francisco. Capra’s Robert Conway never makes it to San Francisco, either—in the film. But, in a rather symbolic manner, the premiere of *Lost Horizon* occurred in San Francisco (1937), representing the metaphorical arrival of Conway in America. What occurs to Hilton’s Conway, furthermore, is never made clear. Capra’s Robert Conway, on

the other hand, successfully navigates back to the paradisiacal sanctum of Shangri-La, thereby relieving the audience of any uncertainty. Frank Capra's Shangri-La is undeniably an American phenomenon, transferred to the romanticized landscape imagery of a mythic Tibetan landscape as a scopic viewpoint of a Western preservation of its past. Shangri-La is less a utopia than it is propaganda, a clandestine conservative playground for Caucasian, right-wing supporters. As such, Shangri-La has developed in tandem with the United States political situation abroad. The evolution of *Lost Horizon* and Shangri-La can be summarized as follows: *Lost Horizon* (1933, Frank Hilton), *Lost Horizon* (1937, Frank Capra), *Lost Horizon of Shangri-La* (1942 rerelease of Capra's original), *Lost Horizon* (1952, edited version of the original), *Lost Horizon* (1973, Charles Jarrott, musical), and the restoration of the original 1937 film (1973). Capra's aforementioned original release was edited numerous times and for numerous reasons. In 1942, a 15-minute speech by Conway protesting the horrors of war was removed in fear that it would be negatively received by the public during World War II. Similarly, the 1952 edition omitted many of the Communist insinuations and much of the positive screening attributed to the Chinese. Shangri-La is not a static utopia (or perhaps a utopia whatsoever), but its mutability speaks to its function as a manifestation of the dominant, conservative American ideology of the time. Shangri-La, and thus Tibet, is a landscape that is colored by the American yearning for preservation, mummification, and stagnation—it is the museum *and* mausoleum of American history and the Western ethic. A striking dialogue occurs between Conway and the High Lama,

Father Perrault:

High Lama: Yes, my son, when the strong have devoured each other, the Christian ethic may at last be fulfilled, and the weak shall inherit the Earth.

Conway: I understand you, Father.

High Lama: You must come again, my son.

The imposition of Christian values within the framework of Shangri-La and Tibet should come as no surprise to the active reader; certainly Shangri-La is a representation of what America wishes to claim and preserve as its own—this offhand insinuation of the second coming of Christ carries the aforementioned Freudian *thanatos* drive by placing the Christian context within an American construct. Moreover, one cannot understate the importance of both Father Perrault's seemingly selective passing and Conway's younger brother's suicide, either. Shangri-La is established based on the mythical landscape of Tibet, but it does not exist as its own entity. The difficulty in locating American treatment of Tibet in film

is caused by land or, rather, the lack thereof—while Shangri-La is imagined even before American political ties with Tibet were opened in 1942, further contact with Tibet was stymied by the ascendancy of the People's Republic of China and its claims to Tibetan lands. In defining the difference between a utopia and a sacred space, Eric Ames writes, "Utopias, by definition, lie outside of time and space (they are designed to accommodate future dwelling, not regular visits by actual pilgrims, for example), whereas sacred landscapes are grounded in geographical place and situated in time" (Ames 62). American filmic treatment of Tibet, however, can locate neither utopia nor sacred landscape within the country itself; ultimately, Tibet becomes infused with the echo of America.

The evolution of Tibet in political context is a point of much debate and contention. Claimed suzerainty over Tibetan lands by the People's Republic of China has stymied Tibetan leadership and led to the Dalai Lama's exodus from Tibet, seeking refuge from the West and, in particular, the United States. In *Ethics for the New Millennium*, the Dalai Lama writes, ". . . we Tibetans had chosen—mistakenly, in my view—to remain isolated behind the high mountain ranges which separate our country from the rest of the world" (3). The segregation of Tibet from Western influences has become troublesome in recent American attempts to represent Tibet in film; since the doors to Tibet are symbolically closed, much of what is gleaned from and about Tibet is based on the testimony of refugee Tibetan Buddhist lamas. Tomoko Masuzawa notes, "On account of its particularly difficult condition as an 'autonomous region' of the People's Republic of China, Tibet has become a virtual nation of uncertain political status and, at the same time, something of a hyper-nation, as it is now believed by some people to be the very embodiment of, or if not quite that, the closest approximation to, a nationhood essentially predicated on a spiritual principle rather than on the usual base material reality of power . . . it is considered a 'dharma nation'" (541). Locating Tibet as a "dharma nation" may be the only way to functionally pinpoint Tibet within modern geopolitical climates. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha posits, "The entitlement of the nation is its metaphor" (718). The metaphor that controls Shangri-La, "Blue Moon" (Karakal), is unique in its application of ironic stillness as the operating function of an ambulatory satellite; the metaphor aligns with readings of Shangri-La as a reserve of the past and brings with it connotations of somnambulation apropos to the dream world. Bernardo Bertolucci's *Little Buddha* (1994) locates the spiritual as the basis for Tibetan culture and demonstrably characterizes Tibet as a "dharma nation." The film acknowledges the Tibetan lamas' refugee status and characterizes Lama Norbu and the other lamas as sagacious globetrotters, scouring the world for the reincarnation of their deceased teacher, Lama Dorje. Their quest

brings them to Seattle, Washington, where they scout out a young American boy, Jesse Conrad, a potential reincarnation of Lama Dorje. The juxtaposition of the Tibetan monks and the American city is rather fascinating (in a dream, Lama Dorje is even seen walking around Seattle in blue jeans) and acknowledges the rather palpable “homeless” status of the refugees. The monk’s trials within America are indeed amusing to watch but their presence within America is quite “real” insofar as the film depicts the American perspective on the plight of the Tibetan Monks. Yet in the confabulation of the image of the Tibetan Monk, the mythic landscape of Tibet is lost. Eric Ames writes, “Tracing its distinctive visuality through a range of media (including travel writing, painting, and cartography), [Peter] Bishop shows that landscape images gave Tibet its imaginary coherence throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—ending in 1951, with China’s invasion and the resulting exile of the Dalai Lama. Since then, it is no longer landscape that has served to organize Western fantasies of Tibet, but rather its esoteric religion” (63). *Little Buddha* ends with the appraisal of three different reincarnation candidates, all of whom are ultimately deemed separate incarnations of Lama Dorje—body, speech, and mind (the three *vajras*).

Little Buddha is not comprised of a solitary tale. Rather, it is the combination of Jesse’s story and the history of Siddhartha Gotama (the Buddha) as mediated by Jesse’s picture book. Bertolucci cast Keanu Reeves as the role of Gotama. Initially a puzzling choice, the decision establishes a dichotomy between the two distinct stories in both space and time. Whereas in Jesse’s story the lamas travel to (and become part of) American society, the Americanization of Gotama’s maturation coupled with the exodus of the lamas to America functions in a similar way to the depiction of Chang (*Lost Horizon*, 1937) by the English H. B. Warner and the establishment of Shangri-La as an American retreat. *Little Buddha* opts for the infusion of Tibetan religious culture within American framework whereas *Lost Horizon* recreated American ideals within a mythologized Tibetan landscape. The cinematic focus on the three *vajras* in *Little Buddha* extends beyond Jesse’s story and has specific, albeit symbolic, relevance within the retelling of Gotama’s path to enlightenment. In *The Twilight Language*, theorists Roderick S. Bucknell and Martin Stuart-Fox introduce and explicate the Tibetan “twilight language” which was “preserved mainly in Tibetan sects, [and] it has long been recognized that certain important teachings are expressed in a form of secret symbolic language known as *samdhyā-bhāsā*, ‘Twilight Language’” (vii). The language—if it can indeed be called that—functions more closely to a codex used to decrypt certain passages of Buddhist texts and requires the simultaneous use of speech, body, and mind to convey the true message. In simpler terms, the written text can be deciphered only with the assistance of a lama trained in the language.

Thai-Monk scholar Buddhadasa notes that “certain aspects of Buddhist teaching are unintelligible, or at least lacking in useful content, unless they are assumed to be symbolic” (Bucknell and Stuart-Fox 11). He calls attention to Māra’s attempts to beguile Gotama—particularly through his three daughters, Tanhā, Arati, and Rati (whose names are “Pali terms meaning ‘Craving,’ ‘Discontent,’ and ‘Desire’”)—and notes that these accounts are symbolic images for the internal pathway to enlightenment. Bertolucci’s screening of the Gotama/Māra paradigm, in lieu of the three *vajras*, suggests that the film functions to exceed a written account; that is, the manifestation of Tibet *must* occur onscreen as the country itself is politically unmappable and the “sacred locations” associated with Tibetan Buddhism are codified by the Twilight Language. American filmic treatment of Tibet in contemporary geopolitical climate is primed to fuse the spiritual aspects of the Tibetan “dharma nation” with the physical, geographic settings of America. By utilizing the Twilight Language, Gotama’s story is positioned as metaphor, allegory, a mythic space in which the story of the Buddha is presented. In comparison with *Lost Horizon*, the American audience is once again presented with a Tibet that is nonexistent, existing only within the fantastic worlds imagined by American filmmakers.

Contemporary American filmic portrayal of Tibet has sidled with the post-modern with the release of Paul Hunter’s *Bulletproof Monk* (2003) and Roland Emmerich’s *2012* (2009). *Bulletproof Monk* introduces the audience to an ancient Tibetan scroll, magically imbued with a script that will grant “power” to either save or destroy the world. The scroll also imbues its protector with the magical ability to remain youthful and inhuman fighting ability. As Sherlock Holmes was revitalized through Tibet and as Shangri-La elongated the lives of its geriatric citizens, *Bulletproof Monk* continues the trope of a cure to aging existing through Tibet. Pursued by an aging Nazi officer, the nameless Monk (Chow Yun-Fat) escapes to New York City where he meets and trains his successor, Kar (Seann William Scott). *Bulletproof Monk* is an interesting example of the irrelevance of historicity and/or cultural relevance in regard to Tibet within contemporary Hollywood-esque films. The plotline of *Bulletproof Monk* aligns closely with that of a Chinese martial arts film, even borrowing the well-known Hong Kong actor, Chow-Yun Fat, as the lead role. Furthermore, Kar, whose name is (as he describes) derived from the Cantonese word for family, learns martial arts through his employment at The Golden Palace, a Chinese martial arts cinema run by an elderly Japanese man. In *Kung Fu Cult Masters*, Leon Hunt states, “Buddhism was a ‘foreign’ influence in China, but it converges with ‘Chinese’ martial arts in the figure of the Indian monk Bodhidharma” (49). Hunter actively blends Asian cultures in a post-modern pastiche that acknowledges its own irony—yet, removed

from the physical country of Tibet, this is not surprising in the least. The magical scroll may be *from* Tibet but its powers are not linked to the country itself; rather, the scroll functions as an objective correlative representing Tibetan Buddhist spirituality and religion itself. Simply put, despite the scroll's dislocation from home it maintains its magic overseas in America and is pursued by the malignant Nazi officer, a despotic ghost from the past that recalls the relationship between Tibet and the PRC. Despite its popular culture references and post-modern tone, *Bulletproof Monk* can ultimately be read as an allegory of the exiled Tibetan lamas and the non-locationality of their spirituality—it is a rather potent testament to the further diminished importance of Tibetan landscape within American filmic depiction.

In *Lost Horizon* (1937) a connection between Christianity and Tibet was established through Father Perrault's Shangri-La. Nearly 70 years later, Roland Emmerich's *2012* once again combines Christian ethic and Tibetan landscape. As a veritable modernization of the biblical story of Noah and his ark, *2012* presents the preservation and survival of the Western world through a safe haven (arks capable of withstanding an apocalyptic flood) built within the mountain ranges of Tibet—a rather familiar storyline, indeed. While the bulk of the plot focuses on the exodus of struggling writer Jackson Curtis (John Cusack) and his family to the arks, there are a few key scenes where Tibetan landscape (firmly in the hands of the PRC) is highlighted as the production ground of the arks. In one such scene, a young lama discusses the end of the world with an older lama, presumably his teacher, who seems to dismiss the idea of apocalypse. At the climax of the film, however, the elderly lama overlooks the torrent of water rushing over the mountains—this image, interestingly, was selectively chosen as the theatrical poster for the film. But perhaps the centrality of this minor Tibetan image on an American blockbuster film's poster can be explained. American film has gradually diminished the importance of Tibetan landscape and focused instead on the ex-tant spirituality that has achieved worldwide recognition. As the controlling image of *2012*, the Tibetan lama staring out over the landscape of Tibet as it is erased below him is, perhaps, the allegory American film was searching for all along—the complete and utter removal of Tibetan landscape influences altogether.

Tibet has been *consumed*, used, and changed—whether we discuss landscape, religion, or the mystique of the Himalayas from the privileged view of the West—but we have thus far ignored the dichotomy that manifests itself within this domain. That is, the pivotal word *consume* neither occurs in isolation nor does it function without dialectic: since while the West *consumes* Tibet, Tibet also *consumes* the West. Khyentse Norbu, known from his advisory role in Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*, emerges as a director in his cinematographic debut, *The Cup*

(1994), with a remarkable look at the inner-workings of an exile Buddhist monastery in Bir, India. While the overall plotline of *The Cup* (known by *Phörpa* in the East) centers around the lighthearted and at times comical attempts of a few young Buddhist monks' earnest attempt at procuring a television to watch the final match of the football World Cup, this story arch eclipses the rather tangential mention of the monastery's role as a haven for men spirited from China to escape religious persecution and receive a traditional Buddhist education. And perhaps by this very evasion these men avoid being *consumed* by the hegemonic Chinese Communist Party in their homeland of Tibet; or, if we place culture into the realm of societal purchase and we consider how the West *consumed* the image of Tibet through fanciful transmogrification, then the actual stymieing of cultural transmission at its roots must be something altogether more pernicious.

While the film's skillful camerawork does pay homage to the beautiful landscape images that have for so long intoxicated the West, it does so in a rushed and disjointed manner, as if to distance itself with previous Western consumerism levied upon Tibet—rather, *The Cup* is a film in which the monks *consume* Western culture and acculturate it into their own. Let us consider, then, momentarily that the object of the young monks' fascination is no ordinary football match; it is not a European rivalry, or even an American scrimmage, but rather it is the geopolitical World Cup. Franklin Foer, in his book *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization*, discusses how football (American *soccer*) has maintained and propagated instinctual concepts, from old-fashioned nationalism to tribalism, in a world steeped in migration and technological innovation. The ability for the World Cup to be consumed by football fans worldwide (despite their current country of residence) posits the issue of whether technology has truly aided global unionization through entities (like the United Nations) or if its ability to relay information across the world at lightning speeds has simply reinforced compartmentalized tribalization. What is interesting to note is that the monastery's interest in the World Cup holds special significance since they spectate *sans* country and without economic or geopolitical stakes in this global conflict. When the World Cup is explained to a distinguished monk as “countries ‘fighting’ over a ball,” the importance of Tibetan interest in the World Cup resonates firmly with the audience. This film is not about a small village, but how Tibet “sees” the world. We thus believe that it is not by accident that the monastery gathers to watch this World Cup after they struggle throughout the film to procure a satellite *dish*—two objects that insinuate eating, the inherent consumerism latent within the village's journey to watch the final match. By the end of the film we realize that what we have come to watch is not a simple football friendly but, in its stead, the adjacency of geopolitical consumerism within the light of

the World Cup: or, Tibet *consuming* the West.

To conclude, in this essay we try to appropriate and actualize Said's critique of Orientalism and Mitchell's conception of the ideology of the imperial landscape in an attempt to show how the fantasy of Tibet as the Other was constructed by the narrative and visual technologies of imperialist ideology in the service of its own interests. We have argued throughout this essay that both the mode of conquest and that of being conquered by the Tibetan landscape have misrepresented and distorted the nature of Tibet, thus actually reflecting the effect of imperialist hegemonic power over the indigenous people.

Between Western imperialism and the communists, Tibet has been consumed, becomes a "contact zone" in which contending powers and interests play against each other. As Bishop has aptly examined, Tibet is now a broken shell: "already substantially empty of heightened, living, imaginative resonance for most Westerners. . . Tibet itself was left abandoned . . . like an old dream, almost forgotten" (244). The disappearance of Tibet into an unknown, inaccessible, distant place is a trauma, a wound that not only haunts the Tibetan exiles but also the whole world, a loss capable of provoking another resurgence of dream and fantasy as seen in the recent Hollywood spectacularization of Tibet. To conclude this essay, we would like to quote a fine passage from Laurie Anderson which describes how Tibetans draw a map:

In the Tibetan map of the world, the world is a circle and at the center there is an enormous mountain guarded by four gates. And when they draw a map of the world, they draw the map in sand, and it takes months and then when the map is finished, they erase it and throw the sand into the nearest river. (229)

This fantasy about the cartographic utopia of Tibet might be read as an incisive allegory of representing Tibet as an ideal Other. Throughout the long river of history, the Western world has tried to draw a map of Tibet; however, just as the Tibetans draw their own maps which are erased once done, the drawing of the Tibetan map by the West can never be accomplished: Tibet only exists in a dream, in the imaginary unconscious of those who strive to reach it. The sad news is that for those who have touched its land(scape), its aura disappears immediately. As a result, Tibet recedes once again into an unknown world of mystery.

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消費西藏： 帝國浪漫與神聖高原的劫難

摘要

數百年來，西藏一直被西方奇觀化，構想成一個神秘而充滿無窮魅力之地。正如愛德華·賽義德批判「東方幾乎是歐洲的發明」一樣，西藏其實也是西方帝國主義的視覺虛擬化和敘述浪漫化。文章選擇了詹姆斯·希爾頓的《消失的地平線》以及後來的好萊塢電影改編，試圖從景觀視覺構成的角度去窺破西方帝國如何編織西藏為「世外桃源」的隱形密碼。文章引用了一些有關後殖民，種族／民族的論述，探討了景觀構造與權力的糾纏，剖析了從海景到山景演變的浪漫景觀美學，重新審視了這種文化想像中所注入的生物權力的問題。文章認為，西方對西藏為「香格里拉」的極端迷戀並不反映西藏本身的令人不安的現實，而是西方帝國自身的身份及文化危機。文章結論認為，西方帝國的環遊世界觀不僅異化了西藏的自然景觀，而且鏤空了西藏文化及宗教的真實性。

關鍵詞：西藏，異托邦，景觀，權力，帝國想像，凝視，他者，奇觀化