



BEYOND SHANGRI-LA

*America and Tibet's
Move into the
Twenty-First Century*

John Kenneth Knaus

WITH A FOREWORD BY
Robert A. F. Tenzin Thurman

BEYOND SHANGRI-LA

—

AMERICAN ENCOUNTERS/GLOBAL INTERACTIONS

A series edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Emily S. Rosenberg

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Beyond Shangri-La

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Move into the
Twenty-First Century*

JOHN KENNETH KNAUS

With a Foreword by Robert A. F. Tenzin Thurman

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FOREWORD



Robert A. F. Tenzin Thurman

I am honored to herald Ken Knaus's masterful account of America's role in Tibet's agonizing and inspiring progress into a future that is still uncertain, either marvelous or horrendous! The world is undergoing dramatic transformations, and Knaus's well-researched and insightful narrative brings to life the human reality of key contributors to the outcome. I especially admire how he has skillfully drawn out, from the tangled web of events and ideas over the century, the central thread of America's hesitant and intermittent recognition of the human right of self-determination as being the seed of the solution to all the rush of tragedies.

Reading about the ups and downs of America's involvement in Tibetan affairs, ranging from W. W. Rockhill's 1909 conversations with His Holiness the Great Thirteenth Dalai Lama up to Barack Obama's 2010–11 meetings with His Holiness the Great Fourteenth, is like attending an epic recital, ending with the dramatic suspense of the unknowns we face everywhere today, confronting prospects of great danger and great potential. Knaus perceptively reveals the transformations that the Tibetan people have suffered through, and he is clearly appreciative of the struggles and achievements of their leader, the Dalai Lama, over six decades.

A distinguishing factor that enormously raises the value of the book is that Knaus, while having his eyes wide open about the foibles and virtues of the many actors in these events, actually likes the Tibetan people. He has known them well under life-and-death conditions by working with them as a CIA operative, trying to help them regain their freedom. Even though that help was

discontinued long ago, he has subsequently given years of effort—hard thought, patient research, and courageous speaking truth to power—not to give up on the Tibetans, whose determination, human warmth, and bravery he came to admire. Governments may adopt and abandon people and nations as their leaders' perceived self-interest dictates, but the true human being, once finding friendship with others, never gives them up.

Knaus is restrained in his critique of some people he has less use for, depicting their shenanigans with a dry wit, while clearly indicating the consequences of their decisions and follies without belaboring or deploring. As for those he admires, such as the Dalai Lama himself, and the more worldly, irrepressible elder brother, Gyalo Thondup, he shows their effectiveness in action.

His mandate is to depict America's role all along in shaping Tibet's trajectory, in relation to China's grasping through conquest at the ring of being the "Great Power" it so anxiously wishes to become. So he does not so much address the role of Tibet in shaping America's and China's trajectories, the different perspective that I never tire in telling.

Readers will understand with total clarity how the Manchu empire, when firmly on top in China, also tried to invade China's mountain neighbor, Tibet; how Nationalist China, once free of the Manchu yoke, tried unsuccessfully also to be an empire and possess Tibet; and how Communist China succeeded in its own grab at imperial conquest, invading and occupying Tibet in 1950–51 and continuing a relentless attempt at the genocidal assimilation of the Tibetan people. The focus of the book is on the part played by American political and military actors in trying their best, with mixed results, to understand, handle, and, exceptionally, even prevent the crushing effects of the grinding wheels of the Chinese imperial chariot. We receive an insider's view of how this history was made.

What we can see is how the "fate of Tibet" was not some supposedly "inevitable tragedy," an inherent fault of the victim or the "manifest destiny" of an uncontrollably expanding Chinese imperium, but rather a result of the pungent combination of imperial blundering with failure of nerve of first the British empire and second its American and Indian successors. Always looming in the background were the self-deceiving fantasies of the successive empires' commercial greed—how much money each one thought it would be able to extract from the belly of the Chinese dragon after feeding her Tibet as a distracting sacrifice. Against this background, the people of principle, with the vision to see past personal desires and prejudices to find the humanity of their Tibetan counterparts, ranging from Sir Charles Bell

and Hugh Richardson all the way to Joel McCleary, Charlie Rose, Nancy Pelosi, the author himself, and a number of others, stand out as the still undefeated exemplars of what is required to turn the tragedy around.

Complementing this vision of the outsiders' roles with the Tibetans' own perspectives are the memoirs of H. H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the members of his family, and the *Portrait* of the Great Thirteenth Dalai Lama left us by the British plenipotentiary Sir Charles Bell (unfortunately, the Great Thirteenth himself did not leave us a memoir).

Finally there is a perspective that has not yet been generally factored in as a *political* perspective, because it may seem to come from a *spiritual* place beyond politics—namely the perspective of the *prophetic* speeches and writings of H. H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama himself, as presented in his many speeches and his books, such as *Ethics for the New Millennium* and *Beyond Religion*. In those works, we can find the Tibetan challenge to the whole militarized world system—the residue of the last five centuries of colonialist imperialism, which is destroying not only Tibetans but also many other local peoples and even our entire little ball of earth and water, our cosmic planetary home. The Dalai Lama calls for a “twenty-first century without war,” with conflicts settled nonviolently through dialogue; a “century of environmental restoration,” with the industrial engines of consumerist greed tuned down to a nonpolluting level; and a “century of mutual understanding,” beyond a “clash of civilizations,” with the world religions and the world movement of secular humanism finding ways of mutual accommodation and a heartfelt embrace of pluralism.

And this is where we can discern the role of the central figure looming above Knaus's tale, the Dalai Lama himself (perhaps in both his concerned embodiments, but especially the present one!), who offers not only Tibet but also America, China, India, and the whole family of nations one viable way out of the potential doomsday we all face if we continue with the clash of “Great Powers.” This way is the path of the *political* embrace of our inevitable interrelatedness, our life-and-death need of nonviolence, and our transformative turn to sincere dialogue with “enemies” as well as “friends.”

In conclusion, a hearty welcome to this magnum opus, and may its skillful narrative and honest factual presentation create a forceful if implicit wake-up call that comes to fruition as soon as possible.

Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Indo-Tibetan Studies, Columbia University;
President, Tibet House US; author of *Why the Dalai Lama Matters*

MAY 2012

PREFACE



In *The Tale of Genji* Murasaki Shikibu wrote, “The storyteller’s own experience of men and things, whether good or ill—not only what he has passed through himself, but even events which he has only witnessed or been told of—has moved him to an emotion so passionate that he can no longer keep it shut up in his heart. Again and again something in his own life or in that around him will seem to the writer so important that he cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion. There must never come a time, he feels, when men do not know about it.”

I have had the privilege of knowing and working with the Tibetans over the past half-century as they have fought and maintained the struggle for the right to live in their own country according to the beliefs that define their unique identity. Consequently I feel the need to record what I know of this history and the variable role that the United States government and people have played in preserving it. It is a chronicle of events, personalities, objectives, and politics—some noble and some self-serving—that have defined the role that the United States government and people with varying constancy have played and continue to play in the past and future of Tibet. It is the legend of a people, their leader, and the actions they have taken to preserve their homeland, their way of life, and their identity as an active presence in the contemporary world.

The history of America’s contributions to the preservation of this unique culture attained enhanced relevance in 2008 from the spontaneous protests raised in Lhasa which spread and continue throughout Tibet protesting China’s rule of their country and the

absence of their exiled leader, whose honorific title “Kundun” means “the Presence.” Beijing’s relentless efforts to suppress these protests and its inflexibility in negotiations with the Dalai Lama’s representatives offering a “Middle Way” aimed at a solution confirming the status of Tibet and its leader continue to chill prospects for resolving this centuries-old conflict.

That the Tibet issue nevertheless remains alive in the foreign policy portfolio of the United States—even as a policy of guilty default—is a testament to both its innate merit and the unique capacity of these people and their “turbulent priest” to attract and retain the better feelings of their fellow man throughout the troubled past century, in the present, and into the future. This book attempts to record this legend, with its claim upon the conscience of people of goodwill everywhere and the role America has played in preserving it, so that there “will never come a time when men do not know about it” and do what they can to ensure that these people and their way of life survive and continue to enrich our lives. The Dalai Lama’s recent announcement of his intention to retire from active participation in the political affairs of his people reaffirms its current relevance. Meanwhile, Kundun, his Presence, and its legacy of participation remain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



A half-century ago Tibet became an active matter of interest and concern on the international scene, when its leader, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, fled his country to avoid complete subjugation by a repressive Chinese government. In the intervening years he and his people and their cause have not only survived but have become the subject of international interest and concern as they moved “beyond Shangri-La” to become contributing participants in the current world.

While writing this book I have had the privilege of being a research associate at the Fairbank Center for East Asian Research at Harvard University, whose distinguished scholars and authorities on China and United States involvement have been of great assistance to me. I am particularly indebted to Professor Roderick MacFarquhar for sharing his keen insights on the politics in China since the Mao government assumed control and in keeping me on track in recording Chinese actions as they affected Tibet. His associates, Merle Goldman, Ezra Vogel, Robert Ross, Arthur Holcombe, and Leonard van der Kuip, and William Kirby have all provided stimulating views on events and personalities in the political scene that has been unfolding in Beijing and Tibet over the past half-century. Holly Angell, Deirdre Chetham, and Jorge Espada have given me needed support. I am grateful to you all.

I have also had the benefit of perusing the papers of William Rockhill at the Lamont Library at Harvard, whose staff maintain them with a deserved sense of pride and provide ready and informed access to them. I am grateful for finding this same informed access at the FDR, Truman, and Kennedy libraries to the

original papers of the presidents filed there. Ambassador Harry Barnes was similarly generous in sharing the conclusions of the mission on which he served, looking for a constructive solution to the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The ready access to President Nixon's conversations in the Oval Office with Dr. Kissinger which were available at the National Archives was a pleasing surprise.

I am also very grateful for the ready reception and assistance I received from the members of the United States Congress and their staffs who have worked with diligence and insight into supporting the Tibetans in their struggle for recognition. From Senator Helms to Senator Feinstein and from Congresswoman Pelosi to Congressman Wolf they have provided their weighty support to a conscientious balance in Washington. Senator Udall's readiness to obtain bipartisan support for my efforts to place a plaque at Camp Hale in his home state commemorating the Tibetans who were trained there and later died defending their country was very gratifying. I am particularly indebted to Congresswoman Pelosi's aide Jonathan Stivers and Senator Udall's aide Jennifer Barrett.

The Tibetan government-in-exile has provided me with ready access to its leaders, particularly the Dalai Lama's family, represented by Gyalo Thondup, his wife and children, and brothers Thubten Jigme Norbu and Lobsang Samten. I am grateful for the long friendship and confidences that Gyalo and his faithful friend the late Lhamo Tsering shared with me as they navigated through the many and at times conflicting demands that have been made on both of them jointly and separately. Having access to Lhamo Tsering's timely reports and compilations of the records of the operations conducted by his fellow countrymen against the Chinese occupation of their country and their efforts to find a lasting peace and an equitable accommodation between his people and their Chinese neighbors has been invaluable. This has been enriched and enhanced by a deep and lasting relationship with many of the younger generation who have served as interpreters and aides between the Tibetan leaders and their countrymen and the Americans who worked with them on common endeavors and enabled us to compile an accurate history of the events that were involved. Lodi Gyari and Bhuchung Tsering have been tireless and effective advocates of the Tibetan government-in-exile's efforts to reach a permanent agreement with their Chinese counterparts concerning regional autonomy within the scope of the Constitution of Tibet. Fortuitously, during the past decade that I have been writing this book, I have shared it with Lobsang Samten as he prepared himself at Harvard to serve his country, which he now does as prime minister of the

Tibetan government-in-exile. They have also been ready to expound on and explain to me the status of these negotiations over the past decade.

I am particularly indebted to Joel McCleary and Robert Thurman for having shared their recollections, documents, and photographs. These provide authoritative evidence of what they have done to carry out successfully the injunction of their Buddhist mentor, Geshe La, that “this is not the age for mountains, but for politics.”

Throughout my work on Tibet I have had the support of my wife, known as “Miss Andy” to the many Tibetans we have known together and who have enriched both our lives. I have also had the privilege of having my children, Maggie, Holley, and John, share this interest and the way of life it represents. Thank you all.

CHAPTER ONE



Washington Discovers the Hidden Land

The Meeting at Wutai Mountain

In the summer of 1908 William Woodville Rockhill, Theodore Roosevelt's envoy to China, made a five-day journey by foot and mule train to a remote mountainous region west of Peking for America's first official contact with Tibet. It was a journey rich in symbolism and political significance. His destination was Wutai Mountain, a Buddhist shrine revered by both Tibetan and Chinese Buddhists. Rockhill was there to meet with a dispossessed Dalai Lama who was en route to Peking, where he had been summoned by the incumbent Manchu rulers anxious to guarantee his continued conformity to their waning authority over his country. This was the beginning of America's now century-old relationship with Tibet and its ruler. It is a history of coincidences and ironies.

The immediate coincidence was that the Dalai Lama, who had fled invading British troops four years earlier, was meeting with the one man in the American government who had unique knowledge of the history and culture of Tibet and appreciated the critical role that the Dalai Lama played in it. The irony was that Rockhill had conflicting drives and commitments. As a young man he had so keen an interest in Tibet that he taught himself the Tibetan language at the Bibliothèque National de France in Paris while attending France's Saint-Cyr Military Academy. Fifteen years later he confirmed this dedication when he resigned from the United



FIGURES 1 AND 2
William Woodville
Rockhill, the Tibetan
ethnographer.

States foreign service and made a trek to eastern Tibet in an unsuccessful attempt to reach Lhasa. This zeal was not untempered when he was welcomed back by the State Department five years later where he became the primary champion of the Open Door Policy to preclude the dismemberment of China. This stemmed from his work as a commissioner negotiating for indemnity for the victims of the Boxer Rebellion.

When Rockhill finally met with the Tibetan ruler in two sessions at the historic shrine of Wutaishan on June 19 and 21, 1908, he demonstrated his role as a diplomat apart from his zeal as an ethnographer.¹ In a breathless dispatch to an equally adventurous President Roosevelt, Rockhill said that the appearance of the Tibetan ruler at their first meeting took him “absolutely by surprise.” He had imagined “a rather ascetic looking youth, bent by constantly sitting bow-legged on cushions, with a sallow complexion and a far-away meditative look.” On the contrary, he had found “a man of thirty-three, with a very bright face, rather dark brown, a moustache and a small tuft of hair under his lower lip, whose eyes were large, rather prominent and obliquely set: his eyebrows rising slightly toward the temples gave him a rather narquois [Fr., cunning] expression. His mouth was large, his teeth white and perfect. His head was bare, and, as it had not been shaved for some days, it added to the general worldliness of his appearance.”² The Dalai Lama, pleased with what he saw in his Tibetan-speaking interlocutor, asked him to return for a more substantive conversation two days later. His primary concern was the options he might have if he acquiesced in his hosts’ requests that he return to Lhasa. He said he was most anxious to return to Tibet, “but that he would not be driven back there by the Chinese: he would go when he was ready, not before.”

Although delighted with his advisory role, Rockhill, the equally careful diplomat, made it clear that there were limitations imposed by his position, and he “could only do certain things to oblige” the displaced sovereign. He optimistically assured him that the Sino-British-Tibetan agreement which had been signed in Calcutta the month before would bring new benefits to Tibet and “spoke to him most earnestly of the desirability for him to establish close trade relations with India and cultivate friendly relations with neighboring states, but especially with India, his closest neighbor.” In response to the Dalai Lama’s reference to “the remoteness of his country and the fact that it had no friends abroad,” Rockhill reassured him that he was mistaken and “he and Tibet had many well-wishers in America and in other countries, who hoped to see him and his people prosperous, well and happy.”

Rockhill concluded, “The Tale [Dalai] Lama seems to me a man of undoubted intelligence, open-minded, perhaps as the result of his misfortunes



FIGURE 3
William
Woodville
Rockhill, the
diplomat.

of the last four years, a very agreeable, kindly thoughtful host, and a personage of great dignity, though simple withal, quick-tempered, perhaps, but of a cheerful temperament.” The never falsely modest Rockhill closed by saying, “[I] felt a deeper and more complete satisfaction with these two interviews with the mysterious potentate and incarnation of the god Shenrezig than would anyone who had not, like myself, given so many years of their life to Tibet. . . . It was all too extraordinary. I could not believe my ears and eyes.”³

Rockhill received a reply from his equally fascinated correspondent, “a real Rooseveltian one.” Although he belittled the letter,⁴ he could only have expected that Roosevelt, with his enthusiasm for undeveloped frontiers, would have been excited by his representative’s meeting with this exotic person. “Really,” the exuberant TR had declared, “it is difficult to believe that it occurred. I congratulate you, and I congratulate the United States upon having the one diplomatic representative in the world to whom such an incident could happen.”⁵ His only question was how he might reciprocate the gifts

that the Dalai Lama had sent him. He had sent the Pope a set of his books. Would this be appropriate for the Tibetan pope? He thought it “just possible” that the Pope might have glanced at them, but he doubted if Rockhill’s new friend would do even that.⁶

Roosevelt shared Rockhill’s report with his close friend, the British ambassador to Washington James Bryce, who thanked him for sharing this “first real glimpse of that mysterious personage that has perhaps been ever obtained by any Westerner capable of appreciating and describing the head of the oldest and strangest church in the world.”⁷ Bryce reported that Foreign Secretary Edward Grey had commented, “[If the Dalai Lama] will only believe that we have no designs upon Tibet and require nothing but a friendly attitude from Tibet in trade relations, he will not be disappointed and will find the result entirely satisfactory to himself and beneficial to Tibet.”⁸ This would seem a measured description of the policy that the British government had adopted toward Tibet in the aftermath of the criticism that had resulted from Younghusband’s successful march to Lhasa four years earlier.

The Dalai Lama Comes to Peking

Two months after his meeting with Rockhill at Wutai Mountain, the Dalai Lama, “after much hesitation, and only after repeated peremptory representations from Peking,”⁹ made his way to Peking. The Manchu government sent a special train to bring him to the Imperial City, where he was received with highest honors. The *Times* continued its censorious coverage of his presence, noting that the Dalai Lama was described by those who saw him as “lacking in intelligence and character. . . . There is no love lost between the Peking city officials and the followers of the ruler of Tibet. The head priest of the Dalai Lama has had several encounters with the officials, who are prone to call him uncomplimentary names to his face. ‘Barbarian’ is one of the least offensive of these.”¹⁰

The *Times* may have been taking its cue from Whitehall’s now restrained enthusiasm for Tibetan matters and the cold shoulder which the Empress Dowager’s court was giving to its reluctant guest once it had him under its physical control in the capital. His imperial audience, scheduled to take place within a week after his arrival, was canceled when the Tibetan leader refused to comply with the court ceremonial, which included kneeling and kowtowing (touching the ground with his forehead). He had unsuccessfully argued that these signs of deference had not been required of his predecessor the Fifth Dalai Lama when he had visited the first Manchu emperor two

and a half centuries before.¹¹ The Chinese Foreign Office then kept him in seclusion by requiring that Chinese officials would accompany any foreign representatives with whom he might wish to meet. (The current Dalai Lama is equally wary of the prospect of similar “Golden Isolation” if he were to accept the offer of the present-day successors of the Manchus to live in Beijing but not in Lhasa.)

The refugee Tibetan ruler resorted to sending an emissary to those foreign ambassadors whose advice and assistance he hoped might help him break out of his isolation. His choice of an envoy was another historical irony. It was the notorious Buryat Mongol Buddhist lama Agvan Dorzhiev. His activities in trying to solicit the support of the tsar for the Dalai Lama eight years earlier had been one of the triggering factors in the mounting of the Younghusband expedition, which had led to the Tibetan leader’s exile. The Mongol monk had first turned to the Russian ambassador Ivan Korostovetz, but he had found no help there. Moscow’s involvement in central Asian politics had greatly diminished after the disastrous shellacking Russia suffered in its encounter with the Japanese three years before. Rockhill reported that Korostovetz’s advice was bleak: “The Dalai Lama had no choice but to submit to what the Chinese Government might decide upon. The time when Russia was concerned in advising or supporting eastern rulers was at [an] end; as a spiritual ruler Russia was greatly interested in the welfare of the Dalai Lama, as a temporal ruler he must obey China.”¹²

When Dorzhiev said that since the Russians were refusing to advise him, he would have to turn to the British minister, Korostovetz discouraged any prospect of assistance from that quarter, saying that Sir John Jordan had told him that he could have no direct relations with the Tibetans. Questions concerning Tibet were to be settled with the Chinese government, the suzerain state as stipulated in the Russo-British Convention of 1907. The Russian minister could only suggest that Dorzhiev see Rockhill as “the representative of an absolutely disinterested power.”¹³

When they met in Peking on October 24 Rockhill found Dorzhiev “a quiet, well-mannered man, impressionable, like all Mongols, and apparently but very little less ignorant of politics and the world in general than the Tibetans.” He did not think he “was . . . more of an intriguer than any Asiatic would be when confronted for the first time” with someone like the Dalai Lama.¹⁴ This was a surprising underestimation of Dorzhiev as both a man and a political player coming from an anthropologist with a cosmopolitan background and by then a seasoned diplomat. Rockhill didn’t survive to witness the overthrow of the Romanov tsars and the succession of the Soviets as

participants in the twentieth-century version of new Great Game of Asia. Dorzhiev, however, not only survived but was to be an active participant in these events over the coming three decades, something about which the United States government was to remain largely ignorant.

Although Dorzhiev must have been expecting encouraging counsel from the only American official who at that time had any knowledge of his adopted country, Rockhill was even more of a determined bystander than his Russian and British colleagues. This became apparent as they talked. The Mongol emissary opened with a bid for advice for the Dalai Lama, who he said was trying to decide whether he should return to Lhasa or remain in Peking until he learned of the reforms that the Chinese were planning for Tibet. He feared that the Chinese government intended to curtail the temporal power he and his predecessors had exercised long before the Manchus came to China.

Rockhill, whose mission as a diplomat was to preserve China's territorial integrity so that its faltering bureaucracy might patch together solutions that would prevent, or at least postpone, its collapse, gave him no encouragement. He bluntly told Dorzhiev, "Whatever may have been the sovereign rights of the Dalai Lama before the present dynasty came to the throne, his present position, like that of his predecessors since the middle of the eighteenth century, was that of a vassal prince whose duties, rights and prerogatives had been fixed by the succeeding emperors." He followed this dose of realpolitik with his opinion that the reforms which the Manchu government was reportedly planning were purely administrative in nature, that is, dividing the country into districts, as in China; reorganizing Tibet's military forces, currency, and education; introducing agricultural and stock-raising programs; and building roads. If these were the reforms contemplated, the American diplomat, who was anxious to see his Manchu hosts develop a more efficient administration within their own country, professed to see no objection the Dalai Lama could have to them. Furthermore, as a defender of Chinese sovereignty Rockhill concluded, "Military questions, relations with foreign states, additional questions (in some countries) were all imperial matters which could not be left to the various states [i.e., the Tibetans] to deal with independently."¹⁵

Although this was not the counsel he had hoped to take back to his principal, Dorzhiev said that the Dalai Lama "had absolutely no objection to raise against the extension of education in Tibet nor to military reforms." He solely feared Chinese encroachment on his temporal authority. He felt strongly on only two issues: that the Yellow Church which he headed should be maintained in all its honors and that he be given the right to send representations

(“memorials”) directly to the throne rather than through local or regional Manchu administrators. Rockhill responded with surprising optimism, saying he was “convinced” that the imperial government would do nothing to lessen the dignity of the Tibetan Church. He considered the Dalai Lama’s wish to communicate directly with Peking “reasonable and in the interest of good government,” but he advised that the Tibetan pontiff “ascertain informally how such a request would be received and act accordingly.”¹⁶

Rockhill then dismissed the Dalai Lama’s emissary with a reaffirmation of his advice that it was in the Dalai Lama’s best interest to get back to Lhasa as soon as possible and “show the Chinese Government that he was sincerely favorable to all measures for the good of his country, as on this must depend the continuance of the Imperial favor and the granting to him of the favors he so much desired.” The American diplomat took a far different tone in this report to TR than in his breathless and admiring dispatch three months earlier describing his first meeting with the Tibetan pontiff at Wutai Mountain. Now he reported that he gathered from this conversation with Dorzhiev that the Dalai Lama “cared very little, if at all, for anything which did not affect his personal privileges and prerogatives, that he separated entirely his cause from that of the people of Tibet, which he was willing to abandon entirely to the mercy of China.”¹⁷ The former Saint-Cyr officer did not countenance willful local monarchs, even exotic ones, who threatened the shaky authority of the government to which he was accredited and determined to support.

Following this bleak meeting of his representative with Rockhill, the humbled Tibetan was kept in splendid political isolation by his hosts, who then gave him an imperial banquet. The Empress Dowager celebrated her seventy-fifth birthday by conferring a new title on him, adding the ominously instructive words “Sincerely, Obedient, Reincarnation-helping” to his existing description as “Great, Virtuous, Self-existent Buddha of the West.” The decree further delineated his status by ordering that he must “immediately return to Tibet . . . be reverentially submissive to the regulations of the Sovereign State, [and] induce the Western Barbarians [i.e., his people] to obey the laws and practice virtue.”¹⁸ The decree denied him the right to address his representations to the throne directly, but dictated that he must communicate through the Chinese resident in Lhasa, “who [would] memorialize for him,” and “must respectfully await the decision.” In response to the by then thoroughly demoralized Dalai Lama’s request for advice on whether he should make one more attempt to obtain the right of direct communication in the letter of thanks he had been ordered to submit to the throne, Rockhill urged that he give up this battle. He counseled that he “saw absolutely no way out of the dif-

ficulty": "The Dalai Lama must submit to his sovereign's commands. He had received many honors, his relations with India had been satisfactorily arranged by China, the interests of the Yellow Church were safe. He must [now] take the bitter with the sweet." The only suggestion that the American diplomat could make was that "he should not delay too long complying with the wishes of the Chinese Government, as it might be misunderstood and lead to further complications."¹⁹ Rockhill was sympathetic, but he obviously thought it was time for this fascinating, but stubbornly independent, subject to yield to the interests of the established order, especially one that the American diplomat was committed to preserving.

Rockhill, the ethnographer and historian, concluded with a clinical note: "The special interest to me is in that I have probably been a witness to the overthrow of the temporal power of the head of the Yellow Church, which curiously enough, I heard twenty years ago predicted in Tibet, where it was commonly said that the thirteenth Dalai Lama would be the last, and my client is the thirteenth."²⁰

The Dalai Lama Leaves Peking

The Dalai Lama's stay in Peking and his first encounter with the United States were disappointing. Rockhill's letter to TR arrived in Washington at the same time that one cable from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced, "Heaven, inexorable and pitiless, has overwhelmed us with deep sorrow depriving us [of] our imperial parent, the departed Emperor of China," and another announced the "visit of a second affliction in the demise of Her Imperial Majesty, the Grand Empress Dowager."²¹ Although the death of the unfortunate emperor, who had ended his days as a semiprisoner in the Imperial Palace, was of less consequence than that of his royal jailer, the successor Manchu government had little interest in dealing any further with their humiliated Tibetan visitor. He remained for the funeral ceremonies of the imperial persons and then left Peking on December 21, 1908.

CHAPTER TWO



The Dalai Lama's Long Journey Home

Despite his American mentor's frigid advice that he accept his admittedly poor situation and get back to Lhasa to deal with it without further delay, the Tibetan ruler chose to travel at a more leisurely pace. It was to be another year before he reached the capital from which he had fled five years earlier. Unlike the generally very favorable press outside of China that the present Dalai Lama enjoys, his predecessor was frequently derided, or at best patronized, by the English-language press of that time. The Peking *North China Daily News* correspondent covered his homeward journey in the same unfavorable light it had accorded his travel to Peking, highlighting the discourteous reception he received when he made his first stop at Kumbum monastery, the birthplace of the founder of the Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism, of which the Dalai Lama is the head. The abbot at first refused to meet him, reportedly because he recalled the pontiff's prolonged stay the year before, with its consequent drain on the monastery's treasury. The reluctant host finally invited his superior to make a return visit despite the burden his stay would devolve upon the local farmers, who would be supplying the head of their church and object of their veneration and his sizable entourage with "straw, peas, fuel, sheep, bread, etc for so long a period." The reporter did note, "The Dalai Lama, shut off from all communication with the outside world save through his own followers, is not aware of the sufferings

of the people through their [his staff's] oppression and leeches, but he left this district followed by many a curse and the hope that they will see his face no more."¹

It wasn't until early spring that the Dalai Lama finally took leave of his hosts at Kumbum to begin his eight-month journey back to his capital. He was in no hurry to confront the new constraints on his political authority that he knew the Chinese were planning to impose. Before leaving Kumbum he sent a letter to Rockhill reaffirming an earlier request for contact and not to forget him.² Some months later Rockhill responded from his new post in St. Petersburg, assuring his depressed client, "I will remain always at the service of Your Holiness."³ On November 11, 1909, Rockhill noted from his new post in St. Petersburg that the Dalai Lama's faithful aide, Dorzhiev, had arrived there.

The Dalai Lama's premonitions about the bleak prospects facing him in Lhasa turned out to be well founded. As he was making his way home in the late summer of 1909, the newly appointed Chinese resident in Tibet, Chao Erh-fang, began to implement the tightened administrative controls over the provinces on the eastern side of the Upper Yangtze, which were heavily populated by Tibetans.⁴ Chao's well-equipped troops carried out these measures with a heavy hand, destroying a number of monasteries and provoking strong resistance from the Dalai Lama's people, which remains alive in this area a century later. The new Chinese overlord then sent an advance guard of two thousand men to Lhasa with orders to seize the Dalai Lama, who had finally reached his capital on Christmas Day 1909. According to Charles Bell, the Chinese plan was to capture the Tibetan pontiff and force him to affix his seal to the decrees imposing the new reforms while executing his ministers, on whom they had fixed a bounty of 1,000 rupees per head.⁵

In another historically ironic act the Dalai Lama decided to seek asylum in the territory of the British from whom he had fled six years earlier. Within two months of his arrival back in his capital the harried Tibetan was again in flight through the winter snows to the Indian border. The Manchu government had meanwhile deposed him for the second time, denouncing him as "an ungrateful, irreligious, obstreperous profligate who is tyrannical and so unacceptable to the Tibetans, and accordingly an unsuitable leader of the Tibetans."⁶ The London *Times* was equally unsympathetic about the plight of one who "seemed to be disposed to emulate the exploits of the Wandering Jew," whose appearance in India was an "awkward complication in a situation already somewhat confused": "For most of the tribulations which have overtaken the Tibetans in recent years the Dalai Lama has been directly responsible, and the only excuse that can be made for him is that up to the time of

his flight he was utterly unversed in worldly affairs and the prey of political adventurers.”⁷

Although the government of India issued orders to maintain strict neutrality, the viceroy did invite him to Calcutta for a state visit, providing him with an escort of Bengal cavalry and a salute from a guard of honor. When they met, the dispossessed pontiff formally requested that his British host intervene on his behalf to urge the Chinese government to withdraw its military occupation of his capital and permit him to exercise the remnant governing powers that it had agreed to allow him.

After his formal meetings with the government of India, the Dalai Lama was taken on a tour of various factories and the Royal Zoo in Calcutta. He then returned to the West Bengal hill station of Darjeeling, where the government of India had rented a house called “Hillside.”⁸ This was to be the exiled pontiff’s home and the seat of his government for the next two years. From there he sent futile appeals to his British hosts to intercede with the Chinese to permit him to return to Lhasa. The supportive British political officer Charles Bell, however, brought the disappointing news that the script-bound British government refused to intervene on his behalf with the beleaguered Chinese government.⁹

In another reversal for the Tibetan, his erstwhile supporter the Russian tsar responded to his appeal with a friendly but noncommittal reply, which was delivered not by a Russian emissary, but by Charles Bell. This final snub was one of the last acts of the Great Game for the control of Central Asia.

The responses to the two appeals for advice and assistance that he had sent to his American intermediary were equally discouraging. Since they had met in Peking Rockhill had lost neither his interest in the affairs of the Dalai Lama nor his conviction that the Tibetan ruler could find no solution to his problems outside the fraying authority of the Manchu Empire. For the past eighteen months the scholar diplomat had spent considerable time at his new post in the tsar’s capital compiling a history of the relationship between the Dalai Lamas and the Manchu emperors over the past two and a half centuries.¹⁰ In replying to the young ruler’s request for how he could extricate himself from his exile and regain his former position in Lhasa, he drew upon this book, which he said he had written thinking his views on this subject might be of use to the Dalai Lama by making them known among foreigners and the Chinese.¹¹

Rockhill assured the Dalai Lama that he had “been constantly thinking how peace and happiness could be permanently restored” to him, his church, and his people. The diplomat declared, “[I cannot] but think that the present

unsatisfactory condition of the relations of Your Holiness and the Government of China is the result of a long standing misunderstanding, which could be dispelled by a full and frank discussion of the various questions in dispute." He recalled that the Tibetan ruler had in his "great wisdom" seen the "vast importance of direct discussions with China of matters affecting Tibet" and had requested the right to correspond directly with the throne, a privilege that "in [his] humble opinion" would be of mutual advantage to both parties. He pointed out, however, that the present relationship between Peking and the Tibetans was based on the laws imposed by Emperor Ch'ien Lung in 1793, after his armies were forced to intervene in Tibet to repel an invasion by the Nepalese Gurkhas occasioned by the intrigues of a renegade brother of the Panchen Lama. These laws empowered the emperor's residents in Lhasa, conferring with the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, to take part in the administration of Tibet; denied the two Lamas the right to address the throne directly in memorials; and gave the residents control over border defenses and foreign intercourse and trade, effectively closing Tibet's borders. Rockhill found these laws "wise and in nowise oppressive, and had they always been equitably carried out, the country would certainly have enjoyed constant happiness." He conceded, "Unfortunately such has not been the case, and the officers of the Emperor posted in Tibet have not always had these laws before them, nor considered the rights of the Yellow Church and the people of Tibet; ignoring the wishes of the Emperor, they have made the sincerity of this affection for the Yellow Church and Tibet to be doubtful."¹²

This dedicated American supporter of Manchu authority, despite its warts, concluded with the clinching argument, "But Tibet must have good government and good government can be given it on the basis of existing laws of the Empire governing it, if they are honestly and impartially applied. *To attain this end close and friendly relations with China are absolutely necessary for Tibet is and must remain a portion of the Ta Ts'ing [Manchu] Empire for its own good, and because the Great Powers of the world deem it necessary for the prosperity of their own peoples*" (italics added). Although dollar diplomacy was to become a trademark of the Taft administration, it was already an ingredient in Rockhill's China policy. His admiration for the Dalai Lama and the country and culture he represented was always tempered by a prime regard for the mercantile interests of the American business community, which required a working relationship with those governing an impoverished China. This was graphically demonstrated in a letter that he sent to the Dalai Lama from his post in St. Petersburg in September 1910, expressing "great sorrow over the many hardships of every kind to which Your Holiness

has been subjected in the past year, and I greatly rejoice that you have found a pleasant safe residence in Darjeeling among devoted members of the Yellow Church.”

The Dalai Lama had little choice but to swallow Rockhill’s views on the appropriate relations between his government and Peking. He did note in his reply that the fixed parameters of the relationship were embodied in stone pillars erected by the Chinese in Tibet recording the pledges of the ancient emperors and the Tibetan pontiffs “to help each other and not bring trouble,” explaining, “If any one violates the oath he would be severely punished.” For a man sitting in exile and dependent upon the hospitality of his former enemy, a return to his capital to rule under the loose governance of the emperor’s resident administrators, but with the autonomy he had enjoyed prior to his two flights abroad, might well have seemed tolerable—as it might to his present-day successor.

It was to be the Tibetan ruler’s lot to try his avuncular British host’s forbearance for another several months, before unforeseen events in China would permit him to return to his capital to resume his former position with greater authority, which he was then to exercise for the next two decades. Meanwhile Washington was quite willing to defer to the benign patronage being accorded by the cousins.

On October 10, 1911, while the Dalai Lama looked on from his refuge in India, four battalions of the Chinese army mutinied against the Manchu governor general in the eastern Chinese city of Wuhan. After considerable maneuvering with both the Manchu rulers and the revolutionary forces centered around Sun Yat-sen, the former courtier Yuan Shih-kai assumed the office of president of the new republic on February 14, 1912, two days after the abdication of the last Manchu emperor, the young boy Pu Yi.

In the Dalai Lama’s capital most of the Chinese garrison mutinied and then moved against the local Tibetans in Lhasa, provoking skirmishes with the ill-armed and untrained Tibetan army and their civilian supporters. The Dalai Lama and his ministers were now ready to fight those who were threatening their country and its religion. Bell cites the reply that the Lhasa authorities sent from their exile in India to a monastery in Tibet, requesting instructions on whether to attack a Chinese company which had arrived on its property: “If they are stronger than you, send them off with soft words. If you are stronger than they are, cut them off by the root.”¹³ This instruction, however, was never sent by the British telegraphers. Bell was furthermore directed to instruct the Dalai Lama to order his people to stop the fighting

and to save the lives of the Chinese mutineers who were now pillaging the Tibetan countryside. The Dalai Lama, expressing bewilderment at what he considered a one-sided display of British neutrality, acquiesced, and the Tibetan government cooperated in the orderly deportation from Tibet of the Chinese resident and the commanding general with his bedraggled troops. The Tibetans even provided food and ponies for those too weak or ill to make their retreat into India, from where they were repatriated.¹⁴ By the end of 1912 the last of the Chinese troops were out of Tibet, and the Dalai Lama returned in triumph to Lhasa in January 1913.

Following these events there was a stiffening of British policy concerning China's relationship with Tibet. On August 29, 1912, the British envoy presented a memorandum reviewing the situation in Tibet to the Chinese government. While recognizing Chinese suzerainty, but not its sovereignty, over Tibet, his note contended that Tibet should be permitted to manage its affairs without Chinese interference. The memorandum objected to the sending of another Chinese expedition then on the borders of Tibet and to the incorporation of Tibet as a province of the new Chinese Republic. It recommended a new Anglo-Chinese agreement as a condition of Britain's recognition of the Chinese Republic, and indicated that British interests might warrant the stationing of a British agent at Lhasa.

The local colonial press was at first slow to pick up these new policy nuances. In Calcutta the *Times of India* reported that Britain's new position was contradictory in recognizing China's suzerainty over Tibet yet condemning its right to use force to enforce its authority there. This was reiterated by the equally bewildered American consul in Chungking, who stated that the views expressed in the *Times* "coincided almost exactly" with his.¹⁵

The Simla Conference

Peking promptly reacted to these shifts in the diplomatic barometer. Yuan Shih-kai's government gave notice that it was not about to repudiate any of the claims made by its Manchu predecessors, rejecting British demands that Tibet not be incorporated into a province of the new republic.¹⁶ After some months of argument, and prompted by concerns over Russian diplomatic successes in Mongolia, a recognition of its own relative weakness, and fear that the British would undertake direct negotiations with the Tibetans which would exclude them, Yuan's government agreed to negotiations on Tibet on the terms set by the British.¹⁷ In October 1913 Ivan Chen, the Chinese representative,

arrived at the Indian hill station of Simla to begin negotiations with Lonchen Shatra, a leading Tibetan minister, and Sir Henry McMahon, the British plenipotentiary, who was assisted by the Dalai Lama's new friend Charles Bell.

McMahon spent the next several months struggling to find a compromise between the Tibetan demand for acknowledgment of the independence they had recently reestablished by evicting the invading Chinese troops from Lhasa and the Chinese claims to sovereignty over Tibet, resting on claims dating back to the Mongol domination of Tibet seven centuries earlier. Under pressure from the British the Tibetans eventually accepted the face-saving concept of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet, but did not agree to the proposed description of Tibet as an integral part of China. McMahon finessed these entrenched and seemingly irreconcilable positions by not including the description in the main body of the agreement, instead tucking it into the proposed notes that were to accompany the final accord. The British diplomat then took on the even more intractable disagreement over the competing claims between the Tibetans and the Chinese over the frontier. The Chinese claimed a line within almost sixty miles from Lhasa which had no historic basis beyond the recent failed Chinese offensives. The Tibetans made claims to land over which they had not exercised jurisdiction on the eastern side of the Yangtze, but which was populated by large numbers of Tibetans who paid spiritual allegiance to the Dalai Lama. To bridge these competing claims McMahon devised the formula of Outer Tibet, which would include the area primarily west of the Yangtze, over which Lhasa had exercised historic jurisdiction, and Inner Tibet, comprising the area on the eastern side in which the population was mainly Tibetan by race and religion. Richardson describes the effect of the proposed split, which would have created Outer Tibet as "something like a self-governing dominion," while Inner Tibet "would have been the subject of peaceful contention in which the better or more attractive administration could be expected to win."¹⁸ This "peaceful contention" persists a century later, as the Hu Jintao government rejects the Dalai Lama's Middle Way proposal for the governance of these areas.

The Chinese emissary opposed the Solomonic solution until the last minute, but along with the British and Tibetan plenipotentiaries he finally initialed the draft. His principals in Peking, however, promptly repudiated his action and refused to sign the Convention, which was formally signed by the British and Tibetan ministers on July 3, 1914. With the outbreak of the First World War later that month Britain had concerns overwhelming those of fixing Himalayan boundaries, and the issue of governance in the Tibetan areas along the Upper Yangtze remains unresolved today.

Throughout this interlude of British intervention the Dalai Lama was re-establishing his position in Lhasa. Soon after his triumphal return to his capital in June 1912 and “when it was seen that the former Chinese position there was completely lost,”¹⁹ Yuan Shih-kai sent word expressing regret at the excesses committed by the Manchu regime that he had served and announcing that he was restoring the Dalai Lama’s official rank. The Tibetan ruler undoubtedly took great pleasure in replying that he wanted no rank from the Chinese, and, in what the Tibetans regard as a formal declaration of independence,²⁰ declared that he had resumed the temporal and spiritual governance of his country.

Despite the slights and humiliations of the previous eight years, when Britain entered the First World War the Dalai Lama, in his newly restored position, offered a thousand Tibetan soldiers to fight on the British side. He did, as Bell noted, “rather pathetically, when offering these men, write that he could not send rifles with them.”²¹ The Tibetan pontiff’s offers of friendship were reciprocated “in a spirit of grudging circumspection” by a then pre-occupied British government.²² Four young Tibetan boys “of good family” were trained at Rugby.²³ But London offered only minimal material assistance in the way of arms or training for the modest Tibetan army, which was confronting Chinese threats and military incursions along the Yangtze frontier. The Simla Conference, with its contested Inner and Outer Tibets, marked the postponement of London’s active involvement in Tibetan affairs while Britain fought for its survival in trenches closer to home.

American Indifference

In the period following his restoration to power in Lhasa the Dalai Lama no longer had the comfort of his culturally empathetic, but politically stringent, American friend. When Rockhill submitted his pro forma resignation President Woodrow Wilson accepted it without appointing him to a new post, as he had hoped. In October 1913 Rockhill therefore left his post in Ankara to make a trip to China by way of Mongolia. In Urga he spoke with the Mongolian minister of foreign affairs, telling him of his “interest in Tibet” and adding, “[I advised] the Dalai Lama not to seek complete independence, etc, and let him draw his own conclusions on the applicability of my advice to his country.”²⁴

In Peking Rockhill accepted Yuan Shih-kai’s offer to become his political advisor at a salary of U.S. \$1,000 per month on the condition that he might reside in the United States. He had no illusions about the man or the government he had agreed to serve. Yuan as an efficient public official serving to prop up the decaying Manchu Empire was one thing. By 1914, however, his

ambitions for power within the infant republic which he would later try to smother had become evident. But apparently Rockhill had hopes that he could exert a restraining influence on Yuan as the kind of strong man that this badly splintered replacement to the vanquished Manchu Empire needed. On December 8, 1914, however, William Rockhill died in Honolulu on his way back to China. With his death the Dalai Lama lost his last contact with America's first official who had an interest in Tibet.

Although some of Rockhill's successors as ambassadors to China were educators, none shared his scholarly interest in remote areas of the former empire. And Washington was preoccupied with the new power structure in the Pacific following a world war in which China had played an insignificant role.

At the local level, the American consul in Chungking, Carleton Baker, who had the responsibility of keeping a watching brief over events on China's western frontier (the area McMahon had designated Inner Tibet), filed voluminous reports on the Chinese government's efforts to subdue local Tibetan uprisings there. Although sympathetic to Peking's aims of exercising its ill-defined suzerain authority over its unruly subjects, he was professionally critical of the mismanagement of the military campaign its badly armed and supplied troops had waged.

Baker apparently received little response or guidance from either the State Department or the embassy in Peking on his reporting. Finally, the hard-working but unappreciated consul complained, "If the Department gives little or no indication as to the importance which attaches to reports which the consul submits from time to time, it is very difficult for him to know whether the painstaking efforts which he has put forth in obtaining material and working it up are appreciated or even desired. The foregoing observations are made with special reference to the reports of Thibet [*sic*] which have been sent from time to time as a result of careful investigation and painstaking work."²⁵ There is no record of any reassuring reply that the consul's efforts to keep Washington informed on events in Tibet were appreciated or encouraged.

Despite feeling that his reports were falling into a void, Baker continued to provide accounts on what he considered to be the feckless campaign that the Nationalist government was conducting in its efforts to preserve its nominal authority over the Tibetans in its western border area. The disgusted consul still defended the right of the Chinese government to exercise its authority over an area in which it was the nominal suzerain power. He pointed out, however, that this right carried with it the obligation to adopt forceful means if necessary to secure it—a responsibility that he accused Peking of shirking. Baker concluded, "Not only has China's program respecting Thibet

been futile as regards immediate results, but the whole idea which China has in subduing the Thibetans and occupying this country is likely to be futile as regards the future. Thibet to the Chinese is a cold, barren, and inhospitable country which is not adapted in any way to their habits and mode of living and it is doubtful if even a successful conquest of Thibet by China would be worth the trouble and expense which this would necessarily involve.”²⁶

Baker noted that the British, with more familiarity with the scene, had apparently arrived at a parallel conclusion. He cited an article printed in 1913 in the *North China Herald* deploring the ineffective and futile Chinese effort to reestablish its authority over the Tibet border area. In its newly found regard for Tibet, this pro-British paper declared, “Tibet is a free country [whose people] breathe freely its pure mountain air.” Unlike its earlier unfavorable assessment of the Dalai Lama and his rule, the paper now asserted, “There is no tyrant’s rule or despot’s lordship there. Its people are virile, brave and free.” The writer added with apparent approval an unidentified quote which painted an idyllic picture of “the high mountains and wide plateaux which give them home and pasture . . . and a freedom very few nations enjoy . . . unencumbered by no regal laws and where no petulant government disturbs their tranquil lives, no magisterial authority breaks the monotony of their romantic existence.” The journalist warned, “Disturb them [the Tibetans] and you disturb a man who loves his country, put them under law and bondage and you will meet with strong resistance. . . . [While] the new young Republic is now looking for new worlds to conquer [and] an outlet is needed for her vast millions [the Chinese should move slowly as] Tibet was made for the Tibetans and nobody else.” From his end-of-the-line outpost the American consul found this article with its rediscovery of Tibet and its people “very convincing.”

The Tibetans may well have had mixed feelings about their neglect by the Great Powers. Although Lhasa could not count on London’s support to counter any moves by the Chinese to extend its authority over Tibet, the Tibetans were left comparatively free to take advantage of the vacuum in Chinese authority on the eastern side of the Upper Yangtze, in which more than half of the Tibetan population lived.

The new revolutionary government in Peking, however, was as unwilling to give up its claims to these border lands as its imperial predecessors had been. It consequently continued a desultory military campaign to impose its authority over this area which McMahon had proposed be delineated as Inner Tibet under Chinese suzerainty—but not sovereignty. These sporadic hostilities kept the area in a state of unrest. Ill-supported Chinese troops