On the fringes of the Cold War, Shangri-La, and American consciousness: Lowell Thomas, Lowell Thomas, Jr., and Tibet, 1949-1970

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On the Fringes of the Cold War, Shangri-La, and American Consciousness:
Lowell Thomas, Lowell Thomas, Jr., and Tibet, 1949 – 1970

by

John F. Ansley

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The snail, when once he gets uncurled
And journeys forth to view the world,
   Is very often known to stray
   As far as seven feet a day.
His wanderings are not very wide
   And yet he seems satisfied…

To travel, brings no goods or gains
To those who haven’t any brains.

—Selection from “The Snail” by James J. Montague

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1 Lowell Thomas Papers 395.3, Miscellaneous Scrapbooks, 1915. This quote was attached to the paste-down endpaper of the front cover of Lowell Thomas’s 1915 scrapbook. James J. Montague (1873-1941) achieved some notoriety as a journalist and poet in the early twentieth century. His satirical articles and amusing poems were among his most popular writings.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Lowell Thomas’s 1949 trip to Tibet, its political implications, what Thomas did to raise awareness for Tibet in the US, and how he helped Tibetans over the last few decades of his life. Lowell Jackson Thomas (1892-1981) became a household name as a newsman, writer, lecturer, explorer, and entrepreneur. His passion for exploration and public speaking led him to crisscross the globe in search of his next big story. One of Thomas’s goals as an explorer was to visit Tibet. After decades of attempting to reach the mecca of travelers, he spent several weeks traveling to Lhasa with his son, Lowell Thomas, Jr., during the summer of 1949, on the eve of its invasion by communist China. Thomas and his son initially traveled to Tibet only to gather material for a new travelogue, but they became entangled in a relationship with the Tibetan people that would last for the rest of their lives.

During their time in Lhasa it became apparent that the Tibetan government invited Thomas to Tibet in the hopes that he would be able to convince the US government to come to the aid of Tibet and keep communist China at bay. Thomas and his son became unofficial ambassadors to Tibet and upon their return to the US they met with the highest level officials in the country. They also embarked on an extraordinary media campaign to raise awareness to Tibet’s plight. They broadcast their story on the radio, traveled across America lecturing, produced films, and wrote articles and books concerning their Tibet experiences. After the Tibet Uprising in 1959, Thomas established one of the first Tibetan refugee organizations, the American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees.

The Thomases helped shape how the American people viewed Tibet at a critical time in US history and they played a little known role in starting the Tibetan Independence Movement.
The Thomases’ efforts to help Tibet may not have gone as they planned, but ultimately they made a lasting contribution in aiding Tibet and Tibetans.
INTRODUCTION

The Making of a Newsman and Travelogue Producer

During the Golden Age of Radio Lowell Jackson Thomas (1892-1981) became a household name as a newsman, writer, lecturer, explorer, and entrepreneur. Over three decades have passed since his death, and his admirers are slowly being replaced by researchers attempting to document the mark Thomas made on the twentieth-century.¹ Today little is recalled of his extraordinary life and career, including the 1949 expedition he made to Tibet with his son, Lowell Thomas, Jr. They traveled to Lhasa to gather materials to create a new Lowell Thomas Travelogue and they ended up devoting decades of their lives to helping Tibetan refugees. Their efforts to raise awareness in America to the plight Tibetans faced from communist China briefly entangled them in Cold War politics during a pivotal time in the shaping of US foreign policy. The Thomases’ Tibet journey only lasted a few months, but it helped shape how Americans and the US government thought about this remote region in the Himalayas, and it became one of the events that ultimately led to the establishment of the Tibet Independence Movement. This dissertation will examine the roles Thomas and his son played in this little known history.

Understanding Thomas’s personality, how he approached his career in the media industry, and how this ultimately impacted his efforts to help Tibet is an important aspect of this history. Thomas was not an introspective man, but he was the consummate optimist. He constantly tried to put a positive spin on everything he did and he considered entertaining his audiences to be part of his job. His approach was highly successful and he became one of

¹ This is based on observations made by the author of this dissertation during his fifteen years as Head of Archives and Special Collections at Marist College.
America’s favorite storytellers. Additionally, Thomas established himself as one of the great public speakers of his day by recalling his travels and encounters in Arabia during WWI. Millions of people flocked to Thomas’s WWI era travelogues and he made T. E. Lawrence a household name as *Lawrence of Arabia*. Thomas continued lecturing and he began turning his talks into popular travel books during the 1920s. The 1930s saw Thomas begin his pioneering work in the broadcasting industry with the NBC radio network. Thomas reported on every major world event from 1930 to 1977 and his name became ingrained in the American consciousness through his work. He was instrumental in popularizing remote broadcasting, became the first person to air a simulcast, and he was the voice of *Fox Movietone Newsreels*. In the early 1950s he co-created Cinerama (an early widescreen motion picture film process) and his movie *This Is Cinerama* became a major success when it opened on Broadway in New York City in 1952. Later that decade he founded Capital Cities, a major broadcasting group that eventually purchased the ABC Network, and is now part of the Walt Disney Company. He created his very popular *High Adventure* television series in the late 1950s, and he continued his news show and world travels. In 1976, Thomas retired from his radio news program, which had been on the air for forty-six continuous years. In 1977, he published *Good Evening Everybody*, the first volume of his autobiography, and just one of the over fifty books he produced. Thomas returned to radio in 1978. National Public Radio aired his series “The Best Years” until just before his death on August 29, 1981.

Late in Thomas’s career he was quoted as saying that “I’m not a journalist, but an entertainer, just as Bob Hope and Bing Crosby are entertainers.” In almost every facet of his career Thomas wanted to entertain his audiences and for the most part he succeeded. Thomas’s

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desire to entertain is a significant point in this history and there are times when it comes into conflict with the assumption made by his audiences that, as a newsman, Thomas was providing purely factual information in his stories. Another important issue to consider is the lens through which Thomas viewed the many ethnic groups and cultures he encountered throughout his career. Thomas was a product of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was heavily influenced by the pervading attitude of white superiority. It is evident in his descriptions of different ethnic groups in the US and foreign cultures that he believed whites had a superior social status; this will be examined in greater detail throughout this dissertation. Thomas frequently used cultural differences to inject humor into his travelogues and the foreign culture he was describing at any given time often ended up being the butt of his jokes. He also liked to portray members of other cultures as noble savages in an attempt to idealize a culture he was featuring in a travelogue. So, it is no surprise that he took the same approach in his Tibet travelogues when trying to raise awareness in America of Tibet’s plight with communist China. However, it will become evident that Thomas’s telling of his Tibet story from the viewpoint of a member of a superior white society was in part why he failed to garner the support he was hoping for with his American audience.

Thomas was the driving force behind the Tibet expedition he shared with his son, but Lowell, Jr. played a crucial role in their efforts to raise Americans’ awareness of Tibet. Thomas heavily influenced his son’s career and he exposed Lowell, Jr. to his work at an early age. Born on October 6, 1923, in London, in the midst of the Allenby-Lawrence travelogue tour,3 Lowell, Jr. quickly became immersed in his father’s lectures. He traveled extensively before entering

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Dartmouth College in 1942 and later that year he joined the US Army Air Forces.⁴ He returned to Dartmouth in the fall of 1946 after he finished serving in the Air Force. While finishing his final year at Dartmouth Lowell, Jr. competed nationally on the College’s ski team and presented lectures across the US based on his travels. Upon completing his degree at Dartmouth he traveled to Iran and Turkey where he collected materials for travelogues he presented on a US tour during the winter of 1948-49. In the summer of 1949, Lowell, Jr. returned to Iran to continue his work and that was where his father contacted him to tell him to meet him in Calcutta to prepare for their trip to Tibet. Lowell, Jr. was building a name for himself, but his father’s reputation was what would draw attention to their adventure in Tibet.

The senior Thomas’s fame appeared to place him in an advantageous position to be an advocate for Tibetans. He seemed to be omnipresent in American popular culture and his work could be heard on the radio, seen on television and movies, and read in books, articles, and advertisements. He became so popular that the Parker Brothers company created a board game featuring his world travels; the Warner Brothers’ animation studio parodied Thomas in their cartoons; he was fictionalized in the film Lawrence of Arabia (1962); the comedian Joe Flaherty impersonated him on Second City Television (SCTV) in the 1970s; and George Lucas included a Lowell Thomas character in an episode of The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones television series in the 1990s.⁵ In Thomas’s prime it must have been difficult for the average American to avoid seeing or hearing his name on an almost daily basis.

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⁴ Lowell Thomas, Jr., interview by Rick Moulton, May 13, 2009, transcript, 22. Oral history conducted by Rick Moulton emailed to author.
⁵ The Parker Brothers board game is entitled the Lowell Thomas Travel Game “World Cruise” a copy can be found in Box 1661, Folder 1, Lowell Thomas Papers, Marist College Archives and Special Collections (hereafter cited as LTP). Thomas parodies appeared in the Warner Brothers’ cartoons She Was an Acrobat’s Daughter (as Dole Promise) and The Film Fan (as Cold Promise), Thomas’s true role in the Lawrence of Arabia story was changed so radically that the name of the reporter was changed to Jackson Bentley in David Lean’s 1962 film, Joe Flaherty’s
Subscribers to Reader’s Digest, Collier’s Magazine, Asia Magazine, National Geographic, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune, and the Los Angeles Times, and many other national magazines and newspapers would frequently find contributions by or about Thomas. He was also in countless print, radio, and television advertisements for a wide-range of items and services, particularly travel by car, train, and airplane. He was on the radio for almost five decades, broadcasting to one of the largest listening audiences in the world at the height of his popularity, and yet his pioneering work in the field of communications barely registers in any book concerning the history of radio.6

Additionally, there is no authoritative biography concerning Thomas – only a collection of essays written by his contemporaries in the late 1960s and published in Lowell Thomas: The Stranger Everyone Knows.7 His two-volume autobiography, Good Evening Everybody: From Cripple Creek to Samarkand and So Long Until Tomorrow: From Quaker Hill to Kathmandu,8 is an excellent example of his desire to entertain as well as inform his audiences. The books consist of a series of engaging stories that are tied together by his travels. These accounts are

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SCTV character, “Lowell Thompson,” was a parody of Thomas’s 1970s television series Lowell Thomas Remembers, and a young Indiana Jones met Thomas on one of his adventures in George Lucas’s television series, The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones, in the episode entitled Tales of Innocence (the series ran from 1992 to 1993).


8 Thomas, Good Evening Everybody; Thomas, Lowell. So Long Until Tomorrow: From Quaker Hill to Kathmandu (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1977). “Good evening everybody” and “So long until tomorrow” were Thomas’s trademark welcoming and closing remarks on his radio news program.
useful in showing Thomas’s desire to regale his audiences with travel stories and they provide a general framework for his life.

There are a few significant books and articles that discuss specific events in Thomas’s life. An important example of this is Claire Keith’s, “The Lowell Thomas Papers” from *The Journal of the T.E. Lawrence Society*. Keith, a foreign language professor, wrote the articles to document Thomas’s interactions with T. E. Lawrence, but her two-part article goes beyond this and provides an excellent review of the materials in the *Lowell Thomas Papers*.9 This description was the first published glimpse into the collection before it was cataloged and an online version of the inventory was made available on the Internet. Joel C. Hodson’s book, *Lawrence of Arabia and American Culture*, also discussed the Lawrence-Thomas relationship, but Hodson concentrated on the impact the “Lawrence legend” had on popular culture in the US.10 Lionel Crocker’s “Lowell Thomas” from *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* provided useful insights into how Thomas developed his lecturing techniques.11 Although there are very few published sources concerning his life and even fewer detailing his experiences with Tibet and Tibetans, there is a tremendous amount of primary source material available concerning Thomas.

An essential source for this dissertation was the *Lowell Thomas Papers* held at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York, and it is the most comprehensive collection in existence concerning Thomas’s life and career.12 Correspondence written by and received by Thomas

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12 The following is a link to the Lowell Thomas Papers finding aid: [http://library.marist.edu/archives/LTP/LTP.xml](http://library.marist.edu/archives/LTP/LTP.xml). This collection consists of over 1,200 linear feet of textual materials, photographs, objects, sound recordings, and
provided detailed information concerning his early life, travelogues he produced, the many aspects of his Tibet journey, his interactions with the US government, and some of his interactions with various relief organizations, including the American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees (AECTR), which Thomas co-founded. The correspondence was particularly important in showing Thomas’s mindset regarding how he developed his travelogues, why he wanted to visit Tibet, and how he dealt with Tibetan and US government officials. The *Lowell Thomas Papers* also contains significant information concerning Lowell Thomas, Jr., and documents the role he played with his father in their effort to educate America and the world about Tibet’s plight. Thomas was the primary mover in this history. He made the trip to Tibet possible, worked closely with US government, and was one of the founders of AECTR. Lowell, Jr. played a major role with his father in promoting Tibet on the radio, in his books, the films he co-produced with his father, and his lectures. Diaries in the collection written by Thomas and Lowell, Jr. also contain significant information. Thomas’s WWII diaries shed light on one of his early plans to visit Tibet and Lowell, Jr.’s Tibet diary provided insights into the Thomases’ thoughts about their expedition that are not recorded elsewhere. Another critical set of documents for this study were the Tibet radio broadcast transcripts. The radio scripts were written by Thomas and his son for Thomas’s news show and they helped document their journey to Lhasa, provided some of their thoughts concerning why they were granted permission to enter Tibet when many other Westerners were denied access, and offered many details about their interactions with Tibetan officials. The broadcasts also established the tone that the Thomases planned to adopt when they returned to the US and began writing and lecturing about their Tibet video. There are approximately one million pages, 40,000 images, hundreds of objects, hundreds of hours of audio, and over one thousand reels of motion picture film in this collection.
experience and revealed how they planned to advocate for Tibet to the White House and the American public.

The *Lowell Thomas, Jr. Collection*, which is an uncatalogued collection held at the Marist College Archives and Special Collections, contains copies of Tibet travelogue scripts that were presented by Lowell, Jr. and his father, and others that were given just by Lowell, Jr. The scripts showed a significant dichotomy in the way the two Thomases presented their Tibet experience to their audiences. Thomas continued with a more sensationalized account, in the same vein as his WWI era *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia* travelogues, while Lowell, Jr. was more staid in his lectures. Lowell, Jr. also produced three books concerning Tibet and the Dalai Lama. His first book, *Out of This World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet* was published in 1950 and became a national bestseller.13 *Out of This World* appeared at a time when the US was becoming increasingly interested in Asia and Asian cultures, and it is important as an example of the glorification of Tibet in Western literature. Lowell, Jr.’s subsequent books *The Silent War in Tibet* (1959) and *The Dalai Lama: A Biography of the Exiled Leader of Tibet* (1960),14 and magazine articles by his father all demonstrate how the Thomases continued to keep Tibet on the minds of Americans years after their 1949 Tibet expedition.

Thomas’s interactions with Washington are an essential part of this history. The papers held at the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum15 provided insights into how the White House, State Department, CIA, and Air Force worked with Thomas immediately after his return from

Tibet in the autumn of 1949. Correspondence, memoranda, and top secret reports all showed that President Truman, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and CIA and Air Force officials all took Thomas’s requests to support Tibet and his suggestions concerning Tibet’s strategic value to the US seriously. The records in the *Papers of Harry S. Truman* and the *Acheson Papers* also showed that Thomas was interacting with the US government during a critical time during the Cold War. He often thought along the same lines as the State Department and CIA concerning how the US should deal with Asia and these papers helped make the case that Thomas was influencing policy in this area, making him, at least marginally, a cold warrior.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Department of State resulted in gaining access to important records documenting Thomas’s interaction with the State Department over the course of several decades. Thomas was known to the State Department beginning with his WWI era travelogues and his interactions with this government agency continued throughout most of his life. Thomas assisted the State Department on various occasions and favors would be returned. These records helped establish that Thomas worked with the US government at various times in his career, but never directly *for* the government, except arguably as a war correspondent.

Another significant collection of research papers concerning Lowell Thomas is also held at the Marist College Archives and Special Collections. The *Fred Crawford Papers* contains a variety of relevant sources collected by Fred D. Crawford from 1991 to 1998. Crawford, who

16 The *Papers of Harry S. Truman* and the *Acheson Papers* are held in the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, in Independence, MO. The *Papers of Harry S. Truman* are in the Presidential File and the *Acheson Papers* are in the Secretary of State File.
17 Fred Crawford Papers, Marist College Archives and Special Collections (hereafter cited at FCP), last modified August 23, 2013, accessed September 9, 2015, [http://library.marist.edu/archives/crawfordPapers/FredCrawfordPapers.xml](http://library.marist.edu/archives/crawfordPapers/FredCrawfordPapers.xml). Crawford earned a BA in English from the University of Chicago (1968), a MA in English (1972) and a PhD in English (1975) from Penn State University.
was a Professor of English at Central Michigan University, was in the process of writing the first biography of Thomas, but he died before completing his book.\footnote{Curriculum Vitae of Fred D. Crawford, FCP, Box 2, Folder 12. Crawford’s working title for his Lowell Thomas biography was \textit{Lowell Thomas: The Voice of America}.} His research materials were donated to Marist College in 2012 and they contain several files that were critical to this dissertation. Crawford obtained copies of the AECTR records that pertained directly to Thomas’s work with the organization.\footnote{The original copies of these files are held at Stanford University in the Hoover Institution Library and Archives. Based on emails and telephone conversations with staff members at the Hoover Institution it became clear that Crawford had copied the pertinent files necessary to complete this dissertation. Additional materials requested from the Hoover institution helped provide extra background information concerning AECTR’s history, but it did not provide any substantive information. However, any researcher wanting to write a definitive history of AECTR would need to visit the Hoover Institution Library and Archives to view the American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugee Records, 1959-1970.} These extensive files document the founding of the organization and the efforts of the committee from 1959 through 1970 to provide aid to the tens of thousands of refugees who fled Tibet after the 1959 Tibetan Uprising. Most importantly, the AECTR files documented Thomas’s continued dedication to helping Tibetans after he realized the US government would not officially support Tibet after communist China invaded in 1950. Thomas continued to raise awareness in America to Tibet and provide significant aid to refugees through the AECTR. It was also an opportunity to allow Tibetans to attend American universities, which Thomas believed would create another opportunity to influence Americans to support Tibet. When Thomas discovered one strategy to provide the help he promised Tibet to be unsuccessful, he found another approach.

Primary sources provided the foundation for this history, but a wide range of secondary resources were useful to this study as well, including books and articles concerning the history of radio, travelogue history, the history of relations between China and Tibet, and the history of the
Cold War. Susan J. Douglas’s *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* and Gerd Horten’s *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* barely mention Thomas’s contribution to radio, and this is true of all published books concerning the history of radio. However, there is one scholarly source that is devoted to Thomas’s radio career; a dissertation that was completed in 1965 for the Ohio State University Speech-Theater Department. 20 “The Broadcasting Career of Lowell Thomas: A Historical and Critical Evaluation of His Professional Life” by John Lerch provides researchers with an important overview of Thomas’s radio and professional career up to 1965, but Lerch obviously did not have access to the range of documents that are available to scholars today. There are many errors and omissions in the narrative, including the few sections of the dissertation that touch on Thomas’s time in Tibet. 21 Overall, the radio histories either treat Thomas as a footnote in this history or the account was written so long ago that the availability of new sources has limited its usefulness.

Histories of travelogues helped put Thomas’s work in this genre into context and show his contribution to the field. Thomas began his career while travelogue greats such as Burton Holmes and Dwight Elmendorf were still presenting their lectures. He learned from these men and surpassed them by developing multi-media extravaganzas based around stories of exotic cultures, and he continued to produce such travelogues for the rest of his career. Genoa Caldwell’s *Burton Holmes Travelogues: The Greatest Traveler of His Time, 1892-1952*, Jennifer Lynn Peterson’s, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film*,

21 A few examples of errors and omissions in Lerch’s narrative include stating that Thomas returned from Tibet in 1954, when it was actually in 1949; that Lowell, Jr. was born in 1922, when it was actually 1923; and Lerch almost entirely omitted Lowell, Jr.’s contribution to the Tibet expedition.
and Richard M. Barsam’s *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*\(^\text{22}\) are three volumes that provide excellent background histories of travelogues, their popularity, how they were produced, and how Thomas fit into their development.

Histories concerning Tibet and China helped explain the long and complicated relationship between China and Tibet, and they aided in clarifying how Thomas fits into this history. It was important to examine a range of sources and to identify relatively unbiased studies of Tibet. Many of these histories were written by individuals that lived through some of the actual events that are significant to this history, such as Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, the former Finance Minister of Tibet, who wrote *Tibet: A Political History*. David Snellgrove, a British army officer who served in India and later became a Tibetologist, and Hugh Richardson, a British Civil Service officer who served in India and worked extensively with the Tibetan government, co-authored *A Cultural History of Tibet*.\(^\text{23}\) Snellgrove’s and Richardson’s direct experiences in India and Tibet provided many insights and details that would not have been known by other historians. However, Shakabpa, Richardson, and Snellgrove had obvious biases favoring Tibet, so it was essential to also use histories written by professional historians. Melvyn C. Goldstein, Matthew T. Kapstein, and R. A. Stein are all highly respected scholars and Tibetologists; I thus also examined works such as *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama*, *The Tibetans*, and *Tibetan Civilization*.\(^\text{24}\)

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Thomas is not entirely left out of Tibet’s history, but his role is not completely understood. Historian of modern China and Tibet, A. Tom Grunfeld, briefly discussed Thomas’s visit to Tibet in 1949 in *The Making of Modern Tibet* and “Tibet and the United States” in *Contemporary Tibet: Politics, Development, and Society in a Disputed Region*.\(^{25}\) Grunfeld touched on the publicity Thomas and his son created as advocates for Tibet, some of their interactions with the US and Tibetan governments, and the fact that Thomas was a founding member of the AECTR. However, he failed to uncover the full extent of Thomas’s involvement with both governments and the extent to which he and his son raised awareness of Tibet in America and for how long. Grunfeld appeared to believe that Thomas was only a cause for false hope of bringing American aid to the Tibetans.\(^{26}\) However, Thomas was not the focus of his study and not all of the documents surrounding this story were available to him at the time when he wrote these two histories. Kristin Bayer, a scholar of Asian history, came closer to uncovering the Thomases’ true role in Tibet’s history in her article, “From *Out of This World* to the Cold War: Lowell Thomas, Tibet, and the State Department.”\(^{27}\) Bayer discussed some of the efforts of Thomas and his son to raise awareness of Tibet in America and their involvement with the Tibetan and US governments. It is an important article and acts as a catalyst in the discovery process of Thomas’s role in Tibet’s modern history, but she did not have the opportunity to discuss his work in-depth or the impact the AECTR had on Tibetan refugees. Neither historian touched on the lasting effect the Thomases efforts to help Tibetans had on the Tibetan Independence Movement. J. Gernet’s, J. R. Foster’s, and C. Hartman’s, *A History of Chinese* 


Civilization; Joseph Fletcher’s “Ch’ing Inner Asia c. 1800” (in The Cambridge History of China by John K. Fairbank); David Martin Jones’s, The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought; William Whitney Stueck, Jr.’s The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950; and Simei Qing’s From Allies to Enemies: Visions of Modernity, Identity, and U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1945-1960 all provided useful background information concerning the history of China. Many other secondary sources can be found in the bibliography that made important contributions to this dissertation as well.

A majority of Thomas’s interactions with Tibet took place during the Cold War, making secondary sources concerning this historical era vital to establishing context for this study. The books used to flesh out this history dealt with the Cold War in Tibet, China, and the United States. A few histories focused on specific events that were taking place at the time of the Thomases’ journey to Lhasa and helped shed light on the actions the US government was taking behind the scenes. Thomas Laird’s Into Tibet: The C.I.A.’s First Atomic Spy and His Secret Expedition to Lhasa told the story of the first CIA field operative who was killed in the line of duty. The story of Douglas Mackiernan’s attempt to reach Lhasa in the spring of 1950 to meet with Tibetan government officials helped establish the importance of Tibet to the US at the time. William J. Daugherty’s Executive Secrets, Covert Action, and the Presidency also shed light on the fact that Washington leaders were not as hands off in Tibet as they claimed to be. A few


volumes briefly mentioned Thomas’s actions during this time and helped establish that he was something of a cold warrior. James Lilley’s *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia* briefly discussed the fact that Thomas collaborated with the US government in an effort to try to help Tibet.\(^{31}\) Albert Siegfried Willner’s “The Eisenhower Administration and Tibet, 1953-1961: Influence and the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy” touched on the Thomases’ efforts to bring US governmental aid to Tibet in 1949.\(^{32}\) Willner briefly discussed the importance of the Thomases’ efforts with the White House and he used it effectively to show the significance Tibet played in Truman’s, but more specifically, Eisenhower’s administration.\(^{33}\)

More general histories of the Cold War provided excellent information concerning US involvement with Asia. Christina Klein’s *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* discussed the increased interest in Asian culture in America and the expansion of US power in Asia and globally after WWII.\(^{34}\) Greater curiosity by Americans in Asian culture is significant for this history due to its timing. Asian cultures were being represented in a wide range of mediums in the US (e.g. plays, movies, articles, books, etc.), and the Thomases’ were broadcasting, writing, and lecturing at a time when most fiction and non-fiction portrayed Tibet as a modern day Shangri-La. The best known work of the time was James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*, which firmly established Tibet in the minds of most Americans as

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\(^{33}\) An investigation of records held at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’s papers held at Princeton University included little that was of direct significance to this history.

twentieth-century Xanadu. The Thomases continued this tradition in their efforts to promote Tibet to their audiences.

Robert J. McMahon’s *Colonialism and Cold War: The United States and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence, 1945-1949* discussed the disintegration of colonial power in Asia after WWII and the impact this had on the international balance of power.\(^{35}\) McMahon focused his study on America’s influence on Southeast Asia, which is particularly useful for this dissertation. Robert Garson’s *The United States and China since 1949: A Troubled Affair* examined Sino-American relations since 1949 and discussed foreign policy and domestic developments in both nations.\(^{36}\) Garson’s authoritative history provided excellent background information for a majority of the time that Thomas was interacting with the US government and Tibetan government (and government-in-exile). In Lewis McCarroll Purifoy’s *Harry Truman's China Policy*, Purifoy argued that McCarthyite pressure caused the Truman Administration to pursue a hostile policy toward communist China.\(^{37}\) However, it also showed Truman’s general antagonism towards communist China during his administration, which in part may explain why he was willing to listen to Thomas’s advice concerning Tibet. Of all the government officials in Washington, Dean Acheson was one of the most influential and most involved with Thomas. It is important to understand Acheson’s role as the Secretary of State while he presided over American foreign policy during a pivotal era of the Cold War. Robert L. Beisner’s highly


regarded biography, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War*, did an excellent job of putting Acheson into the context of this history.\(^{38}\)

The sources used for this dissertation focus on a US perspective by design and necessity. A major goal of this history was to tell the story of the involvement of Thomas, an American newsman, with Tibet and there are significant primary resources available to accomplish this goal. However, the resources documenting the Tibetan government’s understanding of the impact of Thomas’s 1949 visit to Lhasa are extremely limited. The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, the National Archives of India, the Nepal National Library, and the National Archives of Nepal do not hold any primary sources concerning Thomas’s visit to Tibet.\(^{39}\) Archives in China apparently do not hold or make any records concerning Lowell Thomas publicly available. The lack of primary resources from other countries that played key roles in this history necessitated relying heavily on US archival repositories.

Thomas was an extraordinary individual who seemed to live a dozen lives. He was a twentieth century Richard Francis Burton who took his passion and talent for oration, writing, and exploration and used it to become famous in the media industry, and ultimately paved the way for the likes of Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite. He also became a successful businessman, was very charismatic, and highly influential. Thomas cherished his countless friends and connections in the worlds of Hollywood, professional sports, academia, and politics, and he became one of the best known celebrities of his day. He was recognized for his work in motion pictures and radio with two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Thomas provided the color-commentary for the 1939 Major League Baseball World Series and was inducted into the

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39 The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, the National Archives of India, the Nepal National Library, and the National Archives of Nepal all hold significant primary resources concerning the history of Tibet.
U.S. Ski Hall of Fame in 1966 for his work promoting the sport. He received dozens of honorary
degrees from universities around the US and he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom
by President Gerald Ford in 1976.40

Thomas applied his unique personality to all of his productions and he developed a
specific formula for how he presented his stories to his audiences. His method was evident in all
of his travelogues, whether they appeared on stage, television, or in a movie theater. Thomas’s
travelogues, and even his radio news show, took on the air of an operetta. His productions
always had a light and amusing character, even when he was discussing a serious topic, and his
travelogues were divided into distinct acts, very much in the vein of theatrical productions. The
manner in which Thomas presented Tibet’s story to his American audiences is an essential factor
in this history. To understand how he developed his presentation style and sense of the theatrical
it is essential to understand something of Thomas’s character, and to briefly explore his early life
and education.

Thomas was the first major celebrity to become an advocate for Tibet, and he and his son
devoted considerable time and resources to their efforts over the course of several decades.
Thomas aired multiple radio broadcasts to his American audience before returning to the US
from Tibet, and upon his return he became an unofficial diplomat and he worked extensively
with the US government on Tibet’s behalf. After communist China invaded Tibet in 1950 he
and his son raised awareness of the plight of Tibetans through radio broadcasts, articles, lectures,

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40 Thomas received many accolades for his work in broadcasting, including being awarded the Alfred I. DuPont
Award for excellence in broadcasting in 1945 and he was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame in 1986. There
are also three institutions that present Lowell Thomas Awards: the Explorers Club presents its award to individuals who
are accomplished explorers; the Society of North American Travel Writers (SATW) presents its award to individuals who
produce outstanding print, online, multimedia, photographic, audio, or video works; and Marist College
presents its award to individuals in the communications industry to recognize the lifetime achievement of leaders in
the field who embody the high standards that Lowell Thomas demonstrated throughout his career.
books, films, and their refugee relief organization work. Thomas helped Tibet in various ways from 1949 until his death in 1981, and his son continued helping Tibetans for decades after his father’s death. The culmination of the Thomases’ work to help Tibetans arguably led to what we recognize today as the Tibetan Independence Movement.
CHAPTER ONE
Setting the Stage:
Thomas’s Early Career and Travelogues

From the start Thomas’s life was one of excitement and seemed to be preparing him for a career that did not exist at the turn of the twentieth century. He was born on April 6, 1892 in Woodington, Ohio, but grew up in the gold mining communities of Cripple Creek and Victor, Colorado. His parents, Harry G. Thomas, a physician, and his mother, Harriet Wagner Thomas, a teacher, were highly educated for the time, and they both had adventurous spirits. Dr. Thomas moved his family to Victor because of a desire to return to the Rocky Mountains after having worked in the Leadville, Colorado silver mines during his summer breaks while he was an undergraduate student.1 Colorado intrigued him. “It was a new country, it was developing. Opportunities were surely there, and they were.”2 Dr. Thomas went out to Victor first by train, while Lowell and his mother remained in Ohio. After a few months they traveled west to join the head of the Thomas family.

While waiting for Dr. Thomas to establish his medical practice and their new home, Lowell and his mother stayed with an uncle in Chicago. This brief visit proved to be an important moment in Lowell’s life. At eight years old he saw his first play, *Quo Vadis?,*3 which was an adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s historical novel *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero,* which was published in 1895. The play adaptation by Stanislaus Stange came out in 1900, so Thomas must have watched an early production.

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1 Harry G. Thomas oral history transcript, c. 1952-1954, Box 282, Folder 1, LTP.
2 Harry G. Thomas oral history transcript, Box 282, Folder 4, LTP.
3 Gerald Martin Boardman, *The Oxford Companion to American Theater* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 638. *Quo Vadis?* The play was an adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s novel *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero,* which was published in 1895. The play adaptation by Stanislaus Stange came out in 1900, so Thomas must have watched an early production.
of Nero. The plot involved a love story between a Christian woman and a Roman patrician during Nero’s rule, but there were many historical elements included in the narrative. The fact that Thomas was drawn to a fictional story interlaced with realities as a child is significant, because as an adult he made a career out of telling non-fiction stories that included elements of fantasy. Young Thomas was “delighted by the spectacle and became, in that moment, a dedicated votary of the theater.” He must have been captivated by the play; it was rare for Thomas to comment on his personal feelings on any topic in his published or personal writings. He described his first theater experience as taking part in a “living dream,” which was a characteristic he tried to capture in his various multimedia productions throughout his career. The performance had a profound impact on Lowell; one that he would remember in the development of his many travelogues.

Dr. Thomas also had a major influence on his son and many people noted the similarities between Lowell and his father, in particular, the “energy” and “enthusiasm” they showed for life. Dr. Thomas was born May 30, 1869, in Darke County, Ohio. He received a BS from Lebanon College (Ohio), a BA and an MA from Denver University, and a Medical Degree from the University of Cincinnati. He did graduate work at the University of Nebraska, Rush Medical School, Chicago, John’s Hopkins, University of Vienna, and New York University. As a devotee of learning, Dr. Thomas also imbued his son with the desire to learn. While in Colorado
he amassed a library of over three thousand books, which he constantly used to further Lowell’s education.9

Dr. Thomas also loved the theater and shared this passion with his son, who accompanied him to many performances. The theaters in Cripple Creek, and the nearby town of Victor, attracted a wide range of entertainment, including productions of many of Shakespeare’s plays, classical music performances such as Grieg’s Peer Gynt suites, and contemporary entertainers such as Harry Houdini, who opened the Victor Opera House in fall of 1901.10 Thomas again and again experienced the powerful effect the theater could have on an audience. Dr. Thomas also coached his son in diction and public speaking, requiring him to memorize a wide variety of passages ranging from Shakespeare to the story of Paul Revere. The younger Thomas believed this was the most influential component of his education. In 1939 he wrote:

As I look back on it now, if given a chance to do it all over again, and if obliged to choose between four years in college and two years of straight public speaking, I would take the latter, because under the proper direction, it could include most of what one gets from a four year Liberal Arts course, and then some. I can think of nothing that is more likely to add cubits to your stature than well-rounded training in public speaking, combined with plenty of practical experience.

The ability to speak is a short cut to distinction. It puts a man in the limelight, raises him head and shoulders above the crowd. And the man who can speak acceptably is usually given credit for an ability out of all proportion to what he really possesses.11

Thomas never wavered from this belief and from early in his life he found opportunities to learn from others – particularly lessons concerning elocution, where to find an exciting story, and how to present these stories.

9 Thomas, Good Evening Everybody, 49.
10 Harry G. Thomas, oral history transcript, Box 282, Folder 2, LTP.
11 Crocker, “Lowell Thomas,” 298. Lionel Crocker, a Denison University professor, wrote to Thomas in 1939 for an article he was writing concerning Thomas’s career as a public speaker.
Thomas’s natural sense of adventure was heightened while in Cripple Creek as he explored old mine shafts and canyons. He also saw the hard realities of a gold mining town in the forms of prostitution, drinking, violence, gambling, greed, and exploitation. This was another aspect of Thomas’s education that significantly influenced him. He observed the extremes of life at an early age and learned to love that “something in Cripple Creek, that irresistible combination of no-questions-asked frontier town and the chance to strike it rich...”\textsuperscript{12} Thomas followed this philosophy throughout his life, taking many risks in his professional career, bringing himself close to bankruptcy at least twice.

As a junior high school student, Thomas already showed signs of his lifelong passions for education and travel, which may have, in part, been inspired by his seventh grade teacher, who introduced his class to exotic regions around the world, including Arabia, Afghanistan, and Tibet.\textsuperscript{13} In various assignments he wrote about the Amazon River Basin, the Caspian Sea, Bombay, Egypt, and Australia. He carefully drew maps of Africa, and the American Dakotas, and provided their latitude and longitude. Additionally, he wrote a story for his eighth grade class entitled “Prophesy.” In this exciting tale Thomas stars as a university president. Martians are transported to earth with the aid of the Professor of Physics, and the visiting Martians are brought to Chicago to visit the museum of fine arts and to a theater to see a play.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Thomas, \textit{Good Evening Everybody}, 31; Of the approximately 5,000 books from Thomas’s private library, there is only one of his personal grade school textbooks, James Monteith’s, \textit{Barnes’s Elementary Geography} (New York: American Book Company, 1896). It is significant that of all the books he saved from his father’s library and the volumes he collected throughout his life, the one school book Thomas kept was his world geography text. This school-time experience was undoubtedly one of the events that sparked his interested in exotic regions around the globe. This book is located in the Marist College Rare Book Collection. Several of the books in the Rare Book Collection were signed by Harry G. Thomas, indicating they came from Dr. Thomas’s personal library from Victor, Colorado. Thomas’ geography textbook was signed in Thomas’s hand and was dated 1899.

\textsuperscript{13} Geography test taken by Lowell Thomas, Box 253, Folder 4, LTP. Thomas received a perfect score on a geography test, which required him to provide answers about regions around the world. This included Tibet, which he referred to as “the rooftop of the world.”

\textsuperscript{14} Lowell Thomas’ education at Garfield Grade School, circa 1905, Box 253, Folder 5, LTP. This box contains several school assignments completed by Lowell Thomas for his teacher Miss Donahue. The assignments range
attraction to knowledge and the arts was very much in keeping with travelogues of his day, which drew people to theaters and lecture halls by the thousands to learn new “information, knowledge, and concepts about faraway and unfamiliar places.”

By 1900, the Cripple Creek-Victor, Colorado mining district was known as the world’s greatest gold mining camp with 475 working mines. These mines produced more gold than all the California mines of the time, had two railroads, and a population of approximately 17,000 people. As a boy of ten, Thomas delivered newspapers along a route that included Victor’s red-light district, saloons, and gambling halls. By the age of fifteen, he had held nearly every job there was in a mining camp, including working as a mucker, trammer, driller, and an ore sorter. As an ore sorter he heard tales from men who mined gold around the world. Thomas was captivated by those stories, and they ultimately inspired him to go to Alaska, looking for adventure.

Before traveling widely, Thomas began his academic career, which he approached with the same enthusiasm as he did everything else in his life. He attended the University of Northern Indiana at Valparaiso, and in two years he completed a bachelor’s of science and a bachelor’s of arts degree (1909-1911), while also working as a waiter and short order cook. During this time Thomas attended several lectures, including talks given by William Jennings Bryan and Sir

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17 Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 35.
19 1911 Valparaiso Commencement program, Box 162, Folder 4, FCP.
Ernest Shackleton.²⁰ Once again he was drawn to mastery of the spoken language and adventure, and Thomas had the opportunity to personally observe the oration and presentation styles of some of the most successful lecturers of his day.

Thomas returned to Cripple Creek at the age of nineteen with his degrees in hand, but with no purpose or direction. He took a job as a laborer in the mines, but was quickly hired to work as a reporter for the Victor *Daily Record*.²¹ Six months later Thomas became the editor of the Victor *Daily News*, the *Daily Record*’s local competitor. By the fall of 1912 Thomas left the *Daily News* and enrolled at Denver University, where he completed a third bachelor’s degree, and a master’s of arts. While at Denver, Thomas met a fellow student, Frances (Fran) Ryan, who would later become his wife. He also continued his career in journalism and worked as a part-time reporter for the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Times*. While working for the *News* and the *Times*, Thomas found a mentor in Gene Fowler, who later became a Hearst editor and Hollywood scriptwriter.²² After he completed his degrees at Denver University he was at a crossroads again, and contemplated careers in law, journalism, and the ministry. Thomas decided a career in law was the proper path to take, and moved to Chicago where he enrolled in the Chicago-Kent College of Law, and he also took a job as reporter for the Chicago *Evening Journal*. The dean of Chicago-Kent College was apparently aware that Thomas was a trained public speaker and invited him to fill a recently vacated faculty position in the department of forensic oratory.²³ He accepted the position, in addition to attending law school and working as

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²¹ Ibid., 70.
²² Ibid., 74.
²³ Ibid., 78-79; There are three branches of oratory in classical rhetoric: judicial oratory, deliberative oratory, and epideictic oratory. The different branches or genres were used depending on the type of speech being given and each branch was associated with an aspect of time (past, present, or future), set purposes, and special topics of invention. Judicial oratory, Thomas’s area of expertise, was associated with the past, its purpose was to accuse or defend, and its special topics of invention were justice and/or injustice. Deliberative oratory was associated with the
a reporter for the *Evening Journal*. During this time he met Clarence Darrow, Booker T. Washington, and Jane Addams. Thomas was twenty-one years old.

After Thomas completed a few semesters at Kent College he began to feel a certain degree of dissatisfaction with law school. It was then that he came to a deciding moment in his life: his first big scoop as a journalist. In the fall of 1914 he was assigned a story concerning Carleton Hudson, a self-proclaimed financier and philanthropist, who was also favored by many rich elderly ladies in their wills. Thomas ultimately exposed Carleton Hudson as Carleton Hudson Betts, a well-known confidence man from New York. Thomas’s stories in the *Evening Journal* led to Betts’s arrest on December 3, 1914.²⁴ In exposing Betts as a fraud, Thomas saved the owners of the Chicago meatpacking house, Swift, Armour, and Wilson, from dealing with an extortionist. Betts had discovered that the Chicago businessmen had broken a federal statute while pursuing a Texas oil venture, and he was blackmailing them for hundreds of thousands of dollars. The meatpackers’ attorney contacted Thomas after the story broke to let him know of their indebtedness, and that he only had to ask them for the favor to be returned.²⁵ Thomas may not have realized it at the time, but the money he saved Swift, Armour, and Wilson was

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²⁴ Lowell Thomas Scrapbooks, Box 395, Folder 3, LTP. Associated Press. “Thomas Runs Criminal to Cover in East: Former Editor of Victor Record Effects Capture of Notorious Crook,” *The Cripple Creek Times* 23 no. 301 (December 6, 1914): 1B. Paul Crissy, one of Thomas’s newspaper colleagues in 1914, wrote an article concerning Thomas’s “Chicago scoop,” which was reprinted in *The Quill* in 1987; Crissy, Paul. “Lowell Thomas’s Chicago Scoop,” *The Quill: A Journalists’ Journal* (November 1987): 22-23. Crissy’s article described Thomas’s Carleton Hudson Betts story in detail and noted that Thomas was given full credit for the expose and “his name was published from coast to coast.”

²⁵ Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 85-86.
undoubtedly part of the excessive returns they were attempting to hide from the federal government.26

An intriguing episode in Thomas’s early professional life reveals a significant side to his journalistic style: his tendency to fabricate and fictionalize in his reportage. On July 7, 1914, just a few months before his headline-making Betts story, Thomas published an interview in the Chicago Evening Journal with Helen Morton, who was the young heiress to the Morton Salt fortune. Morton had eloped with a man who was deemed undesirable by her family, and the new bride was quickly found and returned to the family’s estate. Thomas had his readers believe that he and a colleague, Webb Miller (who later became the head of the United Press bureau in London), managed to capture an exclusive interview with Morton by floating down the Fox River to gain access to the grounds of the Morton estate. Thomas and Webb claimed to have found Helen outside, and that she was more than willing to tell her sad story to the two young reporters. The story and interview were both contrived by Thomas and Webb.27 It is unclear if Thomas was merely attempting to pull off a hoax or claim a big scoop, but the wrath he incurred from his editor nearly derailed the young reporter’s career.28 Thomas had a sense of humor and he was certainly eager to advance his career, so it is likely that both aspects of attempting to pull off this story appealed to him. His Morton escapade also showed that he was more interested in the story and providing a thrill to his audience (and perhaps himself), than sticking to the facts.

26 Linda J. Bradley and Barbara D. Merino. “Stuart Chase: A Radical CPA and the Meat Packing Investigation, 1917-1918.” Business and Economic History 23 no.1: 196. Swift, Armour, and Wilson were self-made men, and let little stand in their way. Although organized crime did not technically exist in 1911, the meatpackers rarely let a thing like a federal statute stand in their way of a lucrative business deal or a convenient way to mask their excessive profits. Thomas inadvertently did a very powerful group of businessmen a good turn, and they did not forget it. Their generosity ultimately helped Thomas finance his WWI Travelogues.
28 Ibid., 12.
While Thomas was moving forward with his academics and his future profession, he was also thinking about his personal life. He had not seen Fran Ryan since they were classmates at Denver University, but he decided that she was the woman he was going to marry.²⁹ He arranged a leave of absence from the *Evening Journal*, and planned to visit her after the end of Kent’s spring semester in 1915. He did not have the funds for the trip, so he struck a deal with several Western railroad companies to allow him to ride their trains for free in exchange for a series of articles extolling the virtues of the sites and cities along their routes to encourage tourism. The railroad companies agreed.³⁰ Thomas was basically being paid to advertise for the railroad, and his scheme showed his entrepreneurial creativity as well as his willingness to stretch the boundaries of traditional journalism.

Thomas visited Fran in early May,³¹ and continued on to Los Angeles and San Francisco to look for stories for the railroad companies. He then went on to Seattle where he met George W. Hibbard, the general agent of the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad Company. Hibbard, who was an adventurer at heart, arranged for Thomas to climb Mount Rainier, tour the Olympic Peninsula by Stanley Steamer, and go on a sea lion hunt in a dugout canoe. Thomas returned eager for more adventure and he discovered Hibbard had already arranged for him to go on his first trip to Alaska.³² Thomas was delighted to visit the territory he had heard so many tales about while working in the mines at Cripple Creek. When he arrived in Alaska Thomas decided

²⁹ Paul Chamberlain to Fran Thomas, 26 April 1915, Box 269, Folder 3, LTP. Paul Chamberlain was a mutual friend of Lowell Thomas and Fran Ryan from Denver University. Chamberlain wrote to Fran to tell her of Lowell Thomas’s intentions to ask her to marry him. Chamberlain thought this might be a surprise to her as they had not seen one another since their time at Denver University, and Chamberlain wrote his letter in support of the union, extolling Thomas’s many virtues.
³⁰ Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 90.
³¹ Fran was puzzled by Thomas’s sudden interest in her. She had not heard from him since he graduated and she was being courted by another suitor at the time.
³² Thomas’ Alaska Rainier National Park diary of 1915, Box 2, Folder 2, LTP.
to follow the Klondike trail of 1898; the trail that several thousand prospectors took during the Klondike gold rush. He also took the White Pass, and risked his life on the Miles Rapids.  

Thomas left Alaska determined to return. He had little enthusiasm for his second year of law school at Kent, and applied to the new graduate college at Princeton. He continued to work for the *Evening Journal*, and then in the summer of 1916 he returned to Alaska with the idea of capturing motion picture images. Thomas was about to take a major step in his career as a travelogue lecturer. He speculated that if he captured some unusual footage he would be able to induce people to pay to see it, and join the ranks of the other successful travel lecturers of his day. The Chicago *Evening Journal* financed Thomas’s return trip to Alaska, which ultimately cost twenty thousand dollars. Thomas visited Fairbanks, St. Michael, Nome, Skagway, Dawson, the Yukon, and the Alaska interior documenting his trip with still and motion picture cameras.

When Thomas returned to Chicago he learned that he had been accepted as a candidate for a doctorate in philosophy program at Princeton (with a scholarship), and additionally he was offered a faculty position as the head of their forensic speaking department. Thomas quickly wrapped up his affairs in Chicago, and moved east. While attending to his duties at Princeton Thomas also assembled his Alaska travelogue.

Entitled, *Alaska: Our Golden Empire of the North*, his lecture lasted two hours and included—three reels of tinted motion picture footage, 150 hand-colored still images of Thomas shooting the White Horse Rapids, riding a dog sled, hunting polar bears, and playing in a

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33 Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 95. Thomas and his guide were shocked by the violence of the rapids and only luck and his guide’s skill kept them from crashing into one of the many boulders along the river.
34 Thomas used an Ernemann camera which would be considered a very heavy and cumbersome piece of equipment today, but in 1915 it was considered cutting edge and highly portable.
35 Lowell Thomas Scrapbooks, Box 395, Folder 3, LTP.
Thomas put together a brochure that promoted his travelogue, with which he “bombarded” colleges, clubs, and lecture committees. His Alaska Travelogue quickly became a success. He toured the East Coast for several months to sold-out crowds, and on the evening of January 13, 1917, he lectured to an audience of three thousand at Carnegie Hall, in New York City.

Thomas was riding on a wave of popularity created by travelogues that started about a decade earlier, but the origins of this lecture style dated back even further. Illustrated travel lectures were common in the US starting in the 1740s, but a century would pass before the American writer and lecturer, John Lawson Stoddard, would develop what eventually became known as the travelogue. During the 1870s, Stoddard began presenting talks based on his world travels and a new and burgeoning audience kept the public speakers of his day in business. The expansion of the middle class and improved modes of transportation (e.g. steamships and railroads) after the end of the Civil War led to increased tourism. Stoddard and his contemporaries benefited from this increased interest in travel and exploration, and Stoddard led a successful career on the US lecture circuit until he retired in 1897.

Stoddard’s lectures were eagerly anticipated and received by his audiences. It was estimated that he delivered approximately 3,000 talks that were heard by nearly four million people. Thomas eclipsed this mark, but he fully understood why Stoddard and other lecturers

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36 Alaska Travelogue booklet, “Alaska: A Trip to the Land of Gold in Quest of Adventure with Lowell Jackson Thomas World-Traveler, Explorer, and Lecturer (Former Member of the Faculty of Princeton University),” Box 2, Folder 17, LTP.
37 Thomas, Good Evening Everybody, 108.
38 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 68. The greater leisure time and disposable income enjoyed by the middle class made travel for pleasure a much more common form of recreation.
41 Ibid., 70.
of the time were successful; they made sure to follow some basic principles. A lecture or travelogue needed to be a highly polished and refined production to attract an educated audience; the lecturer needed to be a highly skilled, eloquent, and charismatic speaker; the productions needed to be entertaining; the countries or lands described had to have been visited by the lecturer himself; and most importantly, the slides used during the presentations needed to be original and of the highest quality. As Thomas moved up through the ranks as a public speaker, he learned these valuable lessons from his contemporaries and faithfully employed them in his own travelogues.

Elias Burton Holmes, who was known professionally as E. Burton Holmes and later just as Burton Holmes, became a legendary figure in the world of traveloguers, and heavily influenced Thomas’s work. Holmes worked as an associate of Stoddard’s starting in 1892 and assumed the reins of Stoddard’s operation when he retired. Holmes presented illustrated lectures concerning exotic lands including Australia, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco, Panama, the Philippines, and South Africa to US audiences. He understood the importance of having original material for his shows and took many of the photos he exhibited himself. Holmes’s greatest influence on Thomas’s work was his use of new technology. In 1897, Holmes began using motion pictures and other forms of modern media in his illustrated lectures, and his talks became wildly popular and revitalized travel lectures. In 1904, Holmes coined the term “travelogues” and continued to develop the genre that Thomas successfully adopted.
An advertisement for Thomas’s Alaska travelogue show at Carnegie Hall proclaimed it as “The Greatest Illustrated Lecture of the Age” and went on to quote a newspaper review:

Alaska is being taken out of cold-storage by the Tran-Alaskan Railroad Uncle Sam is constructing. The fact that this vast northern treasure vault is about to be unlocked makes this dynamic, sensational, illustrated address of intense interest to every red-blooded American. Of such wide interest is this lecture it has been translated into many foreign languages within the past few months. Prof. Thomas has some of the most remarkable moving pictures ever thrown on a screen and he is a vigorous, inspired Alaskan orator with a voice like an organ. His lecture is as thrilling as a melodrama, as gripping as the most sensational film-play and replete with dynamic information sprinkled with hair-raising stories of adventure.47

Thomas started the show by inviting his audience to “Let your imagination carry you four thousand miles west of New York and two thousand miles north, to the top of Mt. McKinley, where from your observation station four miles above the sea, you can look out over the great, practically unknown empire in the shadow of the Pole—Alaska.”48 He started with the dramatic and settled into a more serious discussion of the history of Alaska, then alternated between sections featuring the territory’s natural beauty, the political situation surrounding Alaska at the time, and the fishing industry. However, Thomas never lectured in the academic sense and his use of vocabulary was never intimidating to his audiences. He transitioned into tales of gold mining in Juneau, and the wild and extreme life in the mining camps, including tales of men striking it rich one day and being murdered the next. Thomas also liked to highlight the fantastic, such as the dubious claim “that practically every foot of ground over an area larger than New Jersey, carries gold in quantities that will make it worth while [sic] to dredge every

47 Travelogue (Carnegie Hall) advertisement, ca. 1916, Box 2, Folder 14, LTP.
48 Alaska travelogue script, early draft Alaska—Uncle Sam’s Frontier Wonderland, Box 2, Folder 15. LTP. Only early drafts of Thomas’s Alaska travelogue scripts have survived.
Thomas skillfully took his audience on his Alaska adventure in his multi-media travelogue and became widely regarded as one of the best public speakers of his time.

The timing of Thomas’s Alaska travelogue could not have been better. President Wilson had just convinced Congress to appropriate $35,000,000 for the Alaskan railroad, and Thomas’s lecture was the perfect tool to promote tourism by the new railroad system. In early January of 1917 Thomas received an invitation from the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane, to speak at an event to launch the “See America First” campaign. George Hibbard, the man who sent Thomas to Alaska, suggested that Lane add Thomas to the list of invitees.

Thomas went to New York to seek the help of a public speaking coach named Dale Carnagey to help him edit his speech for the upcoming meeting in Washington, DC. (Carnagey, the author of How to Win Friends and Influence People, later changed the spelling of his last name to Carnegie.) This was the start of a life-long friendship between the two men.

Thomas was the last speaker of the day-long session held in the Smithsonian Institution, and his shortened lecture was successful. Lane asked Thomas to take over the “See America First” campaign, and he agreed to start in June after he had finished his classes at Princeton. Then on his twenty-fifth birthday, April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. The “See America First” campaign was abandoned, and Thomas was once again summoned to Washington by Lane. This time Thomas was asked to go to Europe, to gather as much footage as he could and return home. In this way he would be able to aid the war effort by helping to bring the realities of a world war home to the American people, many of whom were displeased

49 Ibid.
50 Lowell Thomas Scrapbooks, Box 395, Folder 3, LTP.
51 Thomas Alaska Diary, Box 2, Folder 2, LTP. Lowell Thomas met several times with Carnagey in January 1917.
52 Lowell Thomas to Fran Ryan, April 1917, Box 266, Folder 7, LTP.
with President Wilson, who had promised to keep America out of the conflict during his 1916 reelection campaign. Wilson hoped that Thomas would be able to inspire a sense of patriotism in Americans – or at least make the war more palatable to those who were against the US entering combat – once they saw US soldiers fighting to protect them. Thomas certainly proved to be a loyal American throughout his life, but at this point in his career it is likely that professional advancement was as much or more of a motivating factor to him than patriotic duty.

Although Thomas was appointed by the United States government to travel to Europe to help with the war effort, Lane asked him to raise private funds to expedite his departure. The Secretary of the Interior believed that Congress would not be able to appropriate the money in time for Thomas to leave during the summer of 1917. Thomas had a good idea where he would be able to raise the necessary funds for his trip.\textsuperscript{53} He finished his faculty responsibilities at Princeton for the spring semester and his coursework (having also completed another MA) and then he went to Chicago. By mid-summer he had raised approximately fifty thousand dollars with help from Swift, Armour, and Wilson.\textsuperscript{54} The meatpackers held true to their word and returned Thomas’s favor.

Thomas hired Harry Chase, who was a noted photographer and cameraman for the pioneer travelogue lecturer Frank Roberson, to accompany him to Europe.\textsuperscript{55} While Chase was

\textsuperscript{53} Thomas, \emph{Good Evening Everybody}, 112.

\textsuperscript{54} Henry Veeder to Lowell Thomas, 26 June 1917, Box 500, Folder 18, LTP. Veeder was an attorney associated with Swift, Armour, and Wilson. He promised Thomas $3,000 and suggested that Thomas find subscribers to meet the $50,000 he thought he needed to produce his war time travelogues. Thomas ultimately raised $53,000 in the manner Veeder suggested. This money was spent gathering his WWI travelogue materials by March of 1920. For further information see Box 500, Folder 80, LTP. Veeder, his partner Arthur Veeder, and Thomas E. Wilson were three of many investors in Thomas’s travelogue company. Veeder acted as Vice-President of the \emph{Lowell Thomas Travelogues} venture. Thomas detailed his expenditures and provided an overview of his work overseas in a letter to Henry Veeder dated 21 April 1919.

\textsuperscript{55} Roberson was a popular travelogue lecturer during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of the slides used in Roberson’s lectures are held in the Lowell Thomas Papers at Marist College. More can be learned about Roberson at the Iowa Digital Library website, \url{http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/}. 

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rounding up equipment, Lowell Thomas and Fran Ryan were married on August 4, 1917, in Denver, Colorado. A few days later Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, and Harry Chase, along with hundreds of pounds of camera equipment, film, and glass negatives, left on the passenger ship, the *Chicago*, for Paris.56

Thomas was in an interesting situation. His appointment by President Wilson’s staff basically amounted to a public relations and a fact-finding mission in Europe. He was not officially named a war correspondent, and although he carried out some duties associated with the position, Thomas did not see himself purely as a journalist on this trip, nor did he consider himself solely as an employee of the United States government. However, Thomas did see himself as an entrepreneur. On the free end paper of his diary labeled “Palestine,” he lists his title as “Lowell Thomas, lecturer, correspondent.”57 On the paste down end paper on the front cover there is a note to himself to “Introduce Lecture Series with statement showing how world wide [sic] & complicated the war is, showing pictures of fighting at Sing Tao, Russia, German Colonies in Pacific, Mediterranean, Dardanelles, Salonica, America (N. + S.), Mexico, sea battles: Falkland islands, South seas, Greenland, New Spitzbergen, Bombay. Have animated map, of parts of world in war.”58 He also made a note concerning writing books about his time overseas. Thomas was sketching out his plans for producing more travelogue lectures only months after arriving in Europe, but in all likelihood he had settled on the idea before he went overseas. Thomas intended to fulfill his obligations to the United States government through his travelogue lectures.59

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56 Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 114.
58 Lowell Thomas journal notebook, Palestine, 1918, Box 495, Folder 13, LTP.
59 After examining the existing correspondence from late 1917 through 1918 it is clear that Thomas intended to fulfill his obligations to the White House by producing travelogues based on his experiences.
Thomas spent four frustrating months looking for a story on the Western front. He occasionally wired an article to American newspapers concerning the war in Europe, but he failed to find the exposé he was looking for. During this time Thomas had traveled Europe extensively accompanied by Fran and Chase. By December of 1917 the trio had reached Venice, just starting their tour of the Italian front, when news reached Thomas that British General Edmund Allenby, one of the most successful commanders of the war, had entered Jerusalem. Thomas noted in his “Malta, Egypt, and Palestine” diary that he “expected to spend all of his time gathering material in France, Belgium, at the British Front, in England perhaps, and in Italy.” Then he continued: “if by any chance the British captured Jerusalem, I would go there if there was any possible chance of arranging for the trip.”

There can be little doubt that Thomas was well aware of the fact that the international corps of correspondents covering the war in Europe would leave little room for him, but if he could arrange to get in, he would have the relatively obscure war in the Middle East largely to himself.

Thomas convinced Colonel John Buchan of the London Foreign Office that his reasons to go into the field with Allenby were legitimate. Perhaps the most persuasive was Thomas’s promise “to help stimulate enthusiasm in the war in America…” General Allenby was reluctant to allow an American journalist in the field, but was eventually convinced. Thomas began to prepare for the trip; he arranged for Fran to remain in Italy, partially for her safety, but also to allow for easier communication with his family, and government officials in the United

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60 Lowell Thomas, journal notebook, France, Box 495, Folders 9 and 10, LTP. Thomas kept at least two journals while he was in France. He made notes for many stories, but none were big news, and he was likely feeling frustrated by the competition he was facing with the many other journalists that were in Europe.

61 Lowell Thomas, journal notebook, Malta, Egypt and Palestine, 1918, Box 495, Folder 12, LTP.

62 Ibid. Thomas undoubtedly wanted to help the war effort, but he also realized that getting into the Middle East was his best chance to find a major story.
Then, on January 13, 1918, Thomas and Chase departed from Taranto, Italy by ship to Jerusalem. After they arrived, and their credentials were checked, Chase packed their photographic equipment, and they traveled to Egypt across the Mediterranean Sea. Their crossing was difficult due to a severe storm, and they were detoured to Malta. While in Malta Thomas started making extensive notes in his diary, and continued to do so on a consistent basis for the next several months.

There are five diaries documenting Thomas’s experiences during World War I, and they are as follows (in chronological order): the “European Excursion” diary, the “Malta, Egypt and Palestine” diary, the “Jerusalem” diary, the “Palestine” diary, and the “Arabia” diary. In all of them Thomas made quick observations, recorded anecdotes and personal observations, noted geographical and historical information from his readings, recorded inventories of equipment, noted price lists for supplies, and even the cost of dinner in Egypt. Perhaps the most notable thing about his diaries is that there is little or no introspection. They are written with a single purpose, to gather information—anecdotal, historical, or otherwise—for his new travelogues. Lack of introspection is a consistent characteristic in all of Thomas’ travelogues, and ultimately would have a lasting impact on his success in telling the story of Tibet’s people to a Western audience.

Thomas and Chase arrived in Alexandria on January 26, 1918. While there, they collected stories and pictures, which Thomas eventually turned into the travelogue *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia*. From Alexandria they flew to Jerusalem where they first met Thomas Edward Lawrence. T. E. Lawrence was the British Army Officer and Liaison

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63 There are many letters in the *Lowell Thomas Papers* from Lowell Thomas to Fran Thomas that show his deep devotion to his wife, and his family.
65 Lowell Thomas, journal notebook, Malta, Egypt and Palestine, 1918, Box 495, Folder 12, LTP.
during the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918 who became known world-wide as “Lawrence of Arabia” – entirely due to Thomas’s travelogues, magazine stories, and books. The first meeting between Lawrence and Thomas was brief, as Allenby had only recalled Lawrence from the desert to assess their situation, and Lawrence quickly returned to his guerilla activities. To this point, Lawrence’s role in the war was undisclosed; the British Army wanted the world to think the Arab uprising was spontaneous and only coincidentally helpful in their fight. When Jerusalem was taken, the British Army revealed Lawrence as the brilliant tactician in the Palestine campaign. This was why Allenby was reluctant to allow Thomas in; he wanted to keep his secret weapon a secret. Thomas was fascinated by Lawrence’s story and was determined to follow him into the desert behind Turkish lines. He was immediately impressed with Lawrence’s intellect, but he was more impressed by the potential story Lawrence could yield.

Thomas and Chase spent ten days with Lawrence near Aqaba in March of 1918. Thomas’s “Arabia” diary chronicles his encounter with him. There are extensive notes from an interview conducted with Lawrence, including a description of the siege of Kut El Amara. Lawrence spoke at length concerning the war in the Middle East. Thomas was apparently the first journalist to take an interest in the Arabs, and Lawrence welcomed the positive coverage for a cause he knew was in constant jeopardy. Lawrence helped Chase as he collected photographs of Bedouin soldiers, and of himself. Thomas also gathered as much information as he could about Lawrence from the British officers under his command.66

After visiting Petra, Thomas and Chase left Arabia and returned to Egypt in early April. They eventually reached Cairo at the beginning of May, and from there Thomas and Chase went to Paris to document more wartime activities in Europe. After Paris, they traveled to Strasbourg.

Germany and covered the fall of Germany in Freiburg. Upon the return of Thomas, Fran, and Chase to the United States at the end of the war in 1919, they were stunned to find that Americans were “in no mood for wartime reminiscences.”67 Thomas commented, “Apart from the physical changes—new buildings going up everywhere; automobiles honking horses and pedestrians over to the side of the road—the people, in that typically all-or-nothing American way, seemed totally disinterested in anything to do with the war. They had fought it; they had won it—now they wanted to forget all about it.”68 Thomas had thousands of feet of film, almost a thousand photographs, and a sponsor (the *New York Globe* newspaper), but now he needed to rethink how to approach his lectures. Ultimately, he did what came naturally to him, and he focused on the exotic people, places, and cultures he encountered. His original World War I travelogues opened in the Century Theater in New York City, and were scheduled to run for three weeks. They had developed six different shows: “the A.E.F. in France, the Italian front, the war in the Balkans, Allenby and the Palestine campaign, Lawrence and the Arabs, and the German Revolution.”69 They improvised as they developed their talks and included images and footage they had gathered from all over Europe and the Middle East. However, they quickly realized that the sections concerning Arabia and Palestine were the most popular with their audiences.70 They eliminated the poorly performing shows, and focused their efforts on refining the lectures concerning Lawrence and Allenby.

The travelogues moved to Madison Square Garden for an eight-week run where they played to capacity audiences.71 During this period two important events occurred. Dr. Frank

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67 Joel C. Hodson, *Lawrence of Arabia and American Culture*, 27.
68 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 196. Thomas commented on the poor attendance for the shows concerning Europe and that the seats “only filled up on the nights when Jerusalem and Arabia were scheduled.”
71 Ibid., 197-98.
Crane, a well-known columnist, and prominent member of the Jewish community reviewed the show. Crane endorsed the talk, and demonstrated to Thomas that his lecture also had religious appeal. He had not considered this before, and it was an important lesson to him. He would pay much greater attention to the religious and cultural character of his audiences in the future.\footnote{Keith, “The Lowell Thomas Papers, Part I,” 16-17.}

While planning a full-blown American tour, another prominent fan contacted Thomas; his name was Percy Burton, the theater producer. In a letter to Thomas, Burton invited him to the Lambs Club to “chat over the possibilities and prospects [of his lecture],” and the possibility of Thomas giving his talk at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden.\footnote{Percy Burton to Lowell Thomas, 22 April 1919, Box 499, Folder 11, LTP.} Thomas accepted the invitation and abandoned his plans for an American tour, and hired Dale Carnagey again to help him combine the Allenby and Lawrence scripts for a British audience. Thomas, Chase, Carnagey, and Fran arrived in London at the beginning of August 1919. Later that month Thomas was delivering \textit{The Lowell Thomas Travelogues, With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia} (under the direction of Dale Carnagey).

The Allenby and Lawrence lecture was unlike anything audiences had seen before. It included 285 color lantern slides, thirty film segments, visual effects, an “oriental” dancer, and a pit orchestra consisting of traditional Western instruments which performed an original score entitled “Beduins.”\footnote{Keith, “The Lowell Thomas Papers, Part I,” 20-21.} Percy Burton had arranged for the stage set from the oratorio “Joseph and His Brethren” to be used at the Royal Opera House.\footnote{Ibid., 18.} Chase developed “dissolving effects” for the slides, and the equipment used for the productions was largely invented by him.\footnote{Fred D. Crawford and Joseph A. Berton. “How Well Did Lowell Thomas Know Lawrence of Arabia?” \textit{English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920} 39, no. 3 (1996): 299-300. Crawford and Berton gave an excellent account of Chase’s contributions to Thomas’s WWI travelogues.} However,
the main attraction to the show was the narration of Lowell Thomas. He delivered his two-hour talk six days a week, for weeks at a time. The show was an immediate and major success. Well known audience members such as Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw, Lloyd George, the Royal Family, General Allenby, Prince Faisal, and Lawrence all came to see the show. By the end of the summer Lawrence had become a major celebrity.

The shows opened with the “Mohammedan” call to prayer, while the dance of the seven veils was performed on stage. As recounted by Thomas, “When the theater lights dimmed, a swell of exotic Levantine music, chosen by Fran, filled the darkness… Then I stepped into the spotlight and said: ‘Come with me to lands of history, mystery, and romance. What you are about to see is an untold story, part of it as old as time, and part history in the making.’” The audience then saw scenes from the Armistice celebration and motion picture film of the war in the Middle East. Those in attendance were awed as they watched film transition to colored slides to animated maps through Chase’s skill and ingenuity. Lighting effects, the scent of incense pervading the theater, palm trees decorating the pit orchestra, and a simulated moon illuminating the great pyramids painted on the backdrop all added to the exoticism of the performance. The sense of drama and excitement Thomas created for his audiences was just as important to him as the information he imparted. His early successes using theatrical elements in his shows led him to add this to his repertoire in future travelogues.

The scripts were adapted to suit their audiences. Thomas rewrote them before arriving in London, and again before performing the lecture in Ireland. There are also notes and

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correspondence that indicate the travelogues were a work in progress. Thomas would rearrange scenes, photos, and add his own improvisational touches during his talks.

Thomas did not encounter any restrictions from the United States government in delivering his shows, but he did have to work with the British Government in order to gain permission to use all of the images he and Chase captured during their time with Allenby’s army. Thomas gave a copy of his films to the British Government, and had received some British footage in exchange. However, geographic restrictions were applied to both sets of films. The British government apparently wanted to keep Thomas’s lectures and depictions of their war hero in the United Kingdom. Being restricted to showing the films in England did not appear to be a problem at first. The show was anticipated to run its course in a few months, but the unexpected popularity kept it going for three years in England alone, with subsequent tours in Scotland, Australia, and India. Thomas was required to pay a total of £4,500 for breaking his agreement with the British government by using the films in his travelogues outside of the United Kingdom. This was a significant sum of money at the time, but Thomas determined it was worth the cost to conduct his world tour.

Thomas’s friendship with Carnagey had a bearing on the creation of the Lawrence of Arabia legend, which is illustrated by the correspondence the men kept from their first encounter during the Alaska Travelogues. Their relationship grew during the Allenby-Lawrence production. They worked together on refining the show, dealing with finances, and working a crowd. Their correspondence also showed that they took the production of the travelogues seriously. Their letters include meticulous attention to detail, even covering such specifics as

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81 Ibid., 23-24.
the size, color, and wording of posters. “Allenby’s features should be much clearer and sharper. He should loom above the mass of horsemen like a superman.”\textsuperscript{82} They also discussed business matters and the best way to satisfy the multiple people involved with the production of the travelogue and most importantly, their audiences.\textsuperscript{83}

Carnagey would offer Thomas advice concerning the script even after the show had been running for some time. In a letter dated January 21, 1920, he wrote, “Here are some laughs that I stumbled across that you may be interested in considering. When speaking about the veiled woman and saying that ‘a man never even sees the face of the woman he marries until after the ceremony’ people always laugh. Just pause a few seconds, and then say in a serious tone, then it is too late. You will find your second laugh is much better than the first one.”\textsuperscript{84}

Thomas valued Carnagey’s insights and wrote of his concerns over advertising the lectures. “We must substitute ‘THE LOWELL THOMAS TRAVELOGUES’ for ‘A L-T-T-’ as you now have it. The former is our trademark which must be burned into the mind of every man, woman and child, Pekinese dog and Shetland pony from Lands End to John O’Groats.”\textsuperscript{85} There are also remarks Thomas wrote to Sir William Jury in April of 1919, concerning Percy Burton’s offer of an English tour: “Have you had an opportunity to meet Colonel Lawrence whose picture in Arab costume I gave you? … Before I complete my American tour I intend to make both General Allenby and Lawrence idols of this continent. No two men were ever more entitled to world fame.”\textsuperscript{86} Thomas thrived on being in the limelight and he could not imagine that

\textsuperscript{82} Lowell Thomas to Dale Carnagey, 19 May 1920, Box 499, Folder 13, LTP. Dale Carnegie (also known as Dale Carnagey).
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Lowell Thomas to Dale Carnagey, 19 May 1920, Box 499, Folder 13, LTP. Thomas further discussed the importance of branding his travelogues in his letter.
\textsuperscript{86} Keith, “The Lowell Thomas Papers, Part I,” 25.
Lawrence or Allenby would not feel the same way. However, Lawrence had a very different opinion on the matter and actively spurned the attention he received from Thomas’s travelogues. He was torn in his feelings about Thomas, but Lawrence did seem to understand Thomas’s motivations. He wrote to Sir Archibald Murray, a fellow British army officer, and complained of the attention he was receiving due to Thomas’s lectures. Lawrence concluded by writing, “As a matter of fact he is a very decent fellow – but an American journalist, scooping.”

In 1919, Thomas contemplated the best strategy to make his Travelogues a success. By 1924, he had worked relentlessly to offer the best product he, Carnagey, and Chase could create. At this point Lawrence had not been in communication with Thomas since March of 1923, but he continued to be distressed by the continued exploitation of his name; however, he was still able to separate the man from his motives. In a letter to E. M. Forester, Lawrence wrote “I resent him: but am disarmed by his good intentions. He is as vulgar as they make them: believes he is doing me a great turn by bringing my virtue into the public air: [sic] He came out to Allenby as an American official correspondent, saw a scoop in our side-show, & came to Akaba [sic] (1918) for ten days.” The complicated relationship between these two very different men exposed a relentless aspect of Thomas’s character.

The most striking materials from Thomas’s travelogues were the visual materials, including his motion picture film, black and white still photographs, and colorized lantern slides. Chase captured photographs and film for Thomas, but Thomas used the artist Augusta Heyder to paint all of the slides, which were created from the black and white glass plate negatives brought

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back from Europe, Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia. Heyder never visited the Middle East, so much of her application of color to the lantern slides was guess work and artistic license. Over their four months in the Middle East, Harry Chase captured nearly one thousand images. This was a remarkable feat considering the heavy, cumbersome equipment, and the physical conditions he had to contend with.

The impact of the images was frequently mentioned in reviews of the travelogues. Chase took over thirty portraits of Lawrence while he was in Jerusalem, Aqaba, and London (Lawrence posed for these in his apartment wearing his desert robes). Thomas used these photos frequently throughout the show, and included a series of Lawrence images dissolving in sequence. The effect kept audiences enthralled, and aerial motion picture footage over Jerusalem – which were the first aerial views of the Holy Land – elicited gasps from the audience. The lecture also included some sobering imagery, such as a “plague of locusts” devouring trees and cacti. The fear of famine was then balanced by light-hearted jokes about the taste of fried insects. The few images of wartime deaths included in the show were intended to be dealt with quickly according to the script. Portraits of natives were chosen in an effort to emphasize the exotic nature of the lecture, and the slides were given captions such as, “Bedouin type, beard and villainous eyes.” Thomas’s descriptions of the images reflected the widespread racial stereotypes shared by many Caucasians in the US and the UK. He also solicited compassion for the American Colony in Jerusalem by including pitiful shots of American refugees, and child

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91 Ibid., 27.
92 Ibid., 27.
93 Ibid., 28.
94 Travelogues, original script, Box 501, Folder 3, LTP. These are the labels attributed to the lantern slides in the original script from “With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia.”
95 The American Colony in Jerusalem was established by Anna and Horatio Spafford in 1881. The Spaffords, who were Chicago residents, led a small contingent of Americans to Jerusalem to form a Christian utopian society. The
beggars. Soldiers were also showcased and included such photos as: Anzacs, Tommies, French Poilus, Indians, and Lawrence’s romantic and dangerous looking Bedouins. Carnagey believed they were lacking images in certain areas. He wrote in a letter to Thomas, “The biggest trouble with the Allenby and Palestine Travelogue, and also your lithographs, is this: too many men and not enough women.”

Not everyone who attended the show became fans. A six page letter from a Muslim man protested the “disgraceful” treatment of the Muslim religion. This caused Thomas to rewrite parts of his lecture before his India tour in an effort not to offend the Muslim members of his audiences. Another letter expressed outrage at General Allenby’s “purported statement” that “he would rather have a drunken army than a dead tyre [sic].” The author concluded, “Many prominent persons think probably you are paid by the Brewers [sic] to bring this insidious propaganda [sic].”

The London shows continued their remarkable success into 1920, and the run ended with a command performance for King George and Queen Mary early that year. The production then toured Scotland, Wales, and other parts of England for a few months. After the British circuit ended Thomas contemplated doing an extended American tour. However his plans were redirected. He received an invitation from the Prime Minister of Australia in the early spring, and decided to take the production to Melbourne. Thomas, Fran, and Chase brought their lecture society carried out philanthropic work helping people in Jerusalem no matter what their religious affiliation. Thomas was impressed with the Spafford’s work and helped the organization until it disbanded in the late 1940s. Dale Carnagey to Lowell Thomas, 20 February 1920, Box 499, Folder 13, LTP. Lowell Thomas to Dale Carnagey, 24 April 1921, Box 499, Folder 13, LTP. Keith, “The Lowell Thomas Papers, Part I,” 32. This was a letter from an anonymous audience member dated 1920.
to Australia and New Zealand for the remainder of 1920, and once again played to capacity audiences and received glowing reviews in the Melbourne *Times*.\(^9\)

Early in 1921, Thomas continued his world tour in Singapore. The show ran for four weeks, and Thomas decided to start filming the “exotic sights” with the idea of creating a new travelogue.\(^{10}\) The show then proceeded to Portugal where they performed very short runs, and they then traveled to Malaysia. Finally, they made their way to India, where they continued to perform in cities that were controlled or heavily influenced by the British Empire. The India portion of the lecture circuit lasted almost a year, and the final performance of *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia* was in Bombay.\(^1\) Thomas, Fran, and Chase returned to London in 1922. Their original idea of success was a US tour that they hoped would last a few months. What occurred was something nobody could have predicted—a world tour that lasted almost five years.

During this time Carnagey was not idle. He remained in London and trained a few well-qualified public speakers in an effort to keep the British Travelogue tour going. The shows with the new narrators all quickly closed. Apparently Thomas’s goal to brand his travelogues with his name worked too well; he became so closely associated with his shows that he was considered a feature attraction. While this was ultimately flattering to Thomas, it turned the attempt to prolong the British Tour into a commercial failure. This was only a part of his monetary disappointment concerning the Allenby-Lawrence travelogue. After their five year world tour, Thomas and his wife were only slightly better off financially than when they started.\(^2\) Over

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\(^9\) Lowell Thomas Scrapbook, Box 513, Folder 3, LTP.
\(^10\) Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 232.
\(^1\) Ibid., 235.
\(^2\) Ibid., 257.
four million people came to see his travelogues, but production costs were high for his shows, and his investments in future lectures were also expensive.

Thomas and Chase returned to India and spent the remainder of 1922 filming exotic sites such as the Taj Mahal, Benares, Puri, and the Black Pagoda, in order to complete their new India travelogue. The newly appointed Viceroy of India, the Earl of Reading, enthusiastically supported their venture. He had seen the Allenby-Lawrence travelogue in London, and he hoped Thomas would “do for India what you’ve done for Palestine.” Once again, Thomas wanted to follow a British officer into battle. Major Francis Yeats-Brown of the Seventeenth Bengal Lancers was fluent in several Indian languages, and was very familiar with the country, its history, and its people. Thomas was determined to have Yeats-Brown as a liaison to the army of India on the Northwest Frontier. The Viceroy made the arrangements as requested, and Thomas, Chase, and Yeats-Brown began their tour of India. They traveled over 60,000 miles exploring and filming India before they completed their journey. Yates-Brown summed up their experiences: “We had gone everywhere. We interviewed agitators and saints—were blessed by the Three-Breasted Goddess at Madura and drank tea with Afridi free-booters at Kus; it was a marvelous trip from my point of view, and I think from L.T.’s, although I wondered whether the large sum of money which he spent making ‘Through Romantic India’ could ever yield him an adequate return?”

Days before they concluded their time in India, they were invited to visit Afghanistan by its king, Amir Amanullah Khan. They drove 200 miles across the Afghan desert to reach the border. While Thomas and Chase were in Afghanistan they captured as much footage as they

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103 Ibid., 237.
could. The British Empire had only recognized the country’s independence a year before, so this footage was a remarkable addition to _Through Romantic India and into Forbidden Afghanistan_.

Their new travelogue toured in Britain and France for over a year to sold-out crowds and excellent reviews.

By 1922, Thomas had been presenting travelogues for ten years; starting with the illustrated lectures he had prepared and presented for the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad Company. Prior to that, under his father’s tutelage, he gave recitals at lodge meetings in Cripple Creek, took part in intervarsity debates in his prep school, and competed in oratory contests.

Thomas began his career as a public speaker by developing a solid foundation of fundamental skills provided by his parents, his education, and hard work. His topical choices for travelogues began with his childhood fascination with adventure and exploration. As he matured as an orator he realized the importance of his subject matter to attract an audience and keep them coming back for future engagements. In a letter to Francis Yeats-Brown, Thomas offered him eight pages of advice concerning a travelogue of Canada that Yeats-Brown had been requested to do by the Canadian Pacific Railway.\(^{105}\) This letter provided rare insights into Thomas’s thought process behind his travelogue productions. Thomas’s public persona radiated a calm and confident demeanor, which was reflected in his lectures, books, and articles. His personal correspondence reveals the tremendous amount of work, preparation, and planning that went into his various business endeavors. The effortless and light-hearted style of Thomas was a façade for a man driven to become recognized as one of the great traveloguers of his generation.

\(^{105}\) Lowell Thomas to Francis Yeats-Brown, 24 October 1922, Box 500, Folder 25, LTP. Thomas wrote a lengthy and detailed letter to Yeats-Brown concerning producing a travelogue.
In his letter, Thomas discussed why many travelogues failed, including those of Burton Holmes and Dwight Elmendorf. Thomas had great respect for Holmes and Elmendorf and he made a careful study of their work, but he also learned from what he perceived as mistakes made by those established or attempting to break into the field. Lecturers new to the field failed because they attempted a production beyond their experience, lacking Thomas’s knowledge to launch a major production like With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia. They did not understand “how to lift [a] production out of the ordinary illustrated-lecture class” through the use of technology to achieve new effects. Understanding how to advertise, promote, and finance a travelogue production were also essential skills to finding success on the lecture circuit. Most importantly—and Thomas notes that even experienced lecturers like Holmes and Elmendorf were guilty of this mistake—a travelogue had to contain exciting original footage.

Thomas went on to discuss what he considered the most important subject of his film and photos and what ultimately made his travelogues more successful than his contemporaries – people. “Human beings are more interested in OTHER HUMAN BEINGS [sic] than in spectacular scenery, animals, architectural wonders, or anything else. And the more different the other human beings [sic] are from us, the better.”

Ultimately, an exotic culture, as much as the location, was the deciding factor for Thomas when identifying his next subject for a travelogue. He considered India his best subject of all due to the “amazing contrasts” he saw between Americans and the people of India. Next on

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106 Ibid., 3. Thomas considered Holmes and Elmendorf two of the best at the craft of presenting travelogues and credited them with inspiring him to go into the profession.
107 Ibid., 2.
108 Ibid., 5.
109 Ibid. Thomas also expressed his desire to feature Tibet in a travelogue to Lucian Kirtland, a WWI correspondent and newspaper and magazine writer and editor, see Box 499, Folder 39, LTP. “Lucian Kirtland, 15 May 1921 – 01 Oct 1922,” letter from Thomas to Kirtland 01 October 1922. Kirtland had provided information to Thomas
his list was “China, Central Asia (including Bokhara [Bukhara] and Thibet [Tibet], &c.), the South Sea Islands and Central Africa.”

(It is interesting to note that Thomas listed “Thibet,” as it was spelled in his grammar school geography book, as a separate country or region from China.)

Thomas was being very deliberate in his subject selection for travelogues in order to establish himself as the premiere lecturer of his day early in his career, so he could indulge himself “and talk about castles in Spain, later on when I am certain that the world will come hear me no matter what my subject.”

In the early 1920s, Lowell and Fran discussed returning to the United States to begin a North American lecture tour. As previously mentioned, their plans were delayed a few years with the continuation of their world travelogue tour in southern Asia, India, and Australia. Then, a new addition to their family also made the Thomases reconsider their seemingly constant travel plans. On October 6, 1923, Lowell Thomas, Jr. was born in London. The birth of their son, being continuously on the move since their marriage in 1917, and the constant flux of their financial situation finally convinced the Thomases that it was time to establish a permanent home for their family. The Thomases returned to the United States in early January of 1924 and moved in with Thomas’s parents who had relocated from Colorado to New Jersey. Dr. Thomas had established a new medical practice in Asbury Park after the war. However, it wasn’t until 1926 that the Thomases purchased a home in Pawling, New York.

regarding Tibet and Thomas wrote that he was still interested in featuring Tibet in a travelogue. Thomas also referred to an earlier conversation he had with Kirtland about Tibet while in India and Burma.

Tibet, for all intents and purposes, was a separate country at the time Thomas’s grammar school book was published. The deterioration and subsequent fall of the Qing Dynasty and its general inability to establish centralized control over the region left the Tibetan government free to operate as a sovereign nation.

Thomas’s and Fran’s financial instability forced them to wait to purchase a house. However, once established, they called Dutchess County their home until Fran’s death in 1975 and Thomas’s death in 1981.
Starting in 1924, Thomas maintained a hectic schedule of speaking engagements in the United States. Lecturing kept him primarily in North America, while gathering material for his writing still took him around the world. It is likely due to the fact that Thomas still traveled abroad frequently that he relied on invitations to lecture to fill his calendar while he was in the US. Thomas’s *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia* and *Through Romantic India and into Forbidden Afghanistan* remained popular with his audiences. However, he added to his travelogues or illustrated lectures. Requests were coming in from around the country for his lectures entitled “Ice Men,” “Adventures in the Air,” “Adventures Around the World,” “Strange Tales,” and “First World Flight.” He was also invited to present more traditional, non-illustrated lectures discussing his experiences broadcasting his news program, promoting skiing in North America, and his thoughts on the political and economic conditions of the time.\footnote{Thomas Brady to Lowell Thomas, 23 January 1931, Box 341, Folder 4, LTP.}

Letters and contracts note if Thomas was speaking using slides and motion pictures, or if his lecture was not “illustrated.”\footnote{Typescript lecture schedule from 1934, Box 341, Folder 5, LTP. This source indicated if Thomas was intended to lecture with or without “pictures.” This is one of many documents that noted if Thomas would be performing an illustrated lecture.} He often delivered several talks in multiple cities in North America in a single month, sometimes giving two presentations in a day. He received requests from high schools, universities, national businesses, local clubs, and various societies. If he had time on his calendar Thomas agreed to lecture and he never appeared to be concerned about the venue. He accepted invitations to speak at the National Geographic Society or Explorer’s Club as readily as he did engagements at a local high school or Kiwanis Club. He was also willing to negotiate his fee depending on the circumstances. In the late 1920s, Thomas typically received $250 to $350 to present a lecture; by the late 1940s his remuneration rose to well over $1,000 per engagement. However, Thomas frequently reduced his fee if the organization could not afford

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\footnote{Typescript lecture schedule from 1934, Box 341, Folder 5, LTP. This source indicated if Thomas was intended to lecture with or without “pictures.” This is one of many documents that noted if Thomas would be performing an illustrated lecture.}
his usual rate. In 1934, he presented a lecture for $75 for the Brooklyn Colony of New England Women and he performed an illustrated version of his *Through Romantic India* travelogue in Albany, New York for $125. Presenting his lectures at a reduced rate certainly had the desired effect of increasing his popularity, but we also see Thomas reduce his fees to curry favor from the influential, which was evident from a lecture he presented to the Insurance Advertising Conference in the early 1930s. Thomas appeared before a select group of “people of some importance” who had significant control in the world of publicity and marketing.

In 1930, Thomas began his radio news program, while still maintaining a full lecture schedule. Instead of breaking multiple contracts for his speaking engagements, Thomas took advantage of the recently established practice of remote broadcasting. He scheduled his lectures around his news program and would often broadcast from the local radio station closest to his travelogue venue. His remote broadcasting apparently initiated the practice of adding a “line” or broadcasting charge on top of the usual cost for one of his lectures. The line fee was to be paid by the group or individual requesting Thomas to present a talk and it was intended to cover the cost of Thomas having to air his news show while he was on the road. The Alber-Wickes Platform Service, Thomas’s lecture circuit management company was alarmed by the initial cost of $1,125 per broadcast fee quoted by NBC representatives. The cost was brought down to $250 to $300, and a few months later it was further reduced to $100. In spite of the increasing costs to hear Thomas speak, he received countless letters and telegrams over the years thanking

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116 Ibid. The lecture schedule also indicated that Thomas brought his own operator and equipment for the Albany lecture.
117 ARA to Lowell Thomas, 14 September 1933, Box 933, Folder 20, LTP. The letter was sent from a representative of the Samuel C. Croot Company in New York. Thomas worked with the Croot Company periodically during the 1930s.
118 Gertrude Lamothe to Lowell Thomas, 28 January 1931, Box 341, Folder 4, LTP.
119 Sylvester H. M. Agens, of the Sons of the American Revolution, to Lowell Thomas, 09 May 1931, Box 341, Folder 4, LTP. Thomas’s minimum lecture fee of $300 is noted in pencil at the top of the letter, with an additional notation of $100 for the line charge.
him for his presentations. He learned how to make his talks appear personal while performing
the *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia* travelogue, and he continued this practice
in his other lectures. Thomas often added a unique reference to an audience member or to the
geographic region in which he was speaking during a presentation. While broadcasting his news
program he also noted where he was and included some facts about the local area in his show.\(^\text{120}\)
Thomas was continually building on his public speaking techniques to make his addresses as
accessible as possible to his audiences.

Thomas began expanding his audience by taking his travelogue stories and publishing
them as serialized magazine articles and books in the 1920s. He contributed to a variety of
magazines and journals over the years, but two of his preferred periodicals were *Asia Magazine*
and *Collier’s Magazine*. His frequent contributions to *Asia Magazine* gained a wide following
due to the popularity of his accounts of his WWI era adventures with T. E. Lawrence. Thomas’s
first books were based on his two most popular travelogues, *With Allenby in Palestine and
Lawrence in Arabia* and *Through Romantic India and into Forbidden Afghanistan*. *With
Lawrence in Arabia* was published in 1924, just one year after the end of the *Through Romantic
India* world tour. His first book was well received and since its publication over one hundred
editions have been printed in many languages. *Beyond Khyber Pass: Into Forbidden
Afghanistan* was published in 1925, as was *The First World Flight: Being the Personal
Narratives of Lowell Smith, Erik Nelson, Leigh Wade, Leslie Arnold, Henry Ogden, and John
Harding*.\(^\text{121}\) Shortly after the release of *With Lawrence in Arabia*, Thomas became the official

\(^{120}\) Paul Burkholder, of the Rotary International, Chicago, to Lowell Thomas, 21 June 1933, Box 915, Folder 10,
LTP. Mr. Burkholder thanked Thomas for his “splendid address” and “for [Thomas’s] reference to our community
and state in your broadcast.”

\(^{121}\) Lowell Thomas, *Beyond Khyber Pass: Into Forbidden Afghanistan* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1925) and
historian for the first around the world flight, which he documented in his typical enthusiastic fashion in *The First World Flight*. This story also became a popular request on his lecture circuit. Thomas went on to publish at least forty-one books between 1924 and 1949.\textsuperscript{122}

His books became a new outlet for his travelogues; they allowed him to reach larger and more diverse audiences than ever before. He continued to focus on people, foreign cultures, and exploration in his writing. Adventure was his over-arching theme, and he wrote his manuscripts in rapid succession. After completing three books in two years, his pace did not slacken.

Thomas’s next three volumes, *Count Luckner, the Sea Devil*, *European Skyways: The Story of Europe by Aeroplane*, and *The Boys’ Life of Colonel Lawrence* were all released in 1927 by various publishing houses.\textsuperscript{123} In 1927, Thomas also entered into a contract with the publisher Doubleday, Doran & Company (known today as the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Random House) to write six books.\textsuperscript{124} While completing his contract with Doubleday, he continued to write for a variety of other publishers.\textsuperscript{125} It is not clear if working with multiple publishing houses was part of his contract with Doubleday. However, it is not surprising to find Thomas pushing the limits of an agreement, as he did while presenting his Lawrence and Allenby travelogues in the United States and the United Kingdom.

\textsuperscript{122} This total is based on a search of the books in the Lowell Thomas Papers held in the Marist College Archives and Special Collections and examining the results of a search on the World Cat database (accessed 10 March 2014).


\textsuperscript{124} Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 278-279; A. C. Travis to Lowell Thomas, 23 October 1931, Box 746, Folder 9, LTP. The letter discussed the book contract.

\textsuperscript{125} The publishers included: William Heinemann; The Century Company; Hutchinson & Company; Funk & Wagnalls Company; Little, Brown and Company; J. Long, Farrar & Rinehart; Dodd, Mead & Company; Dodge Publishing Company; Grosset & Dunlap; and The Saalfield Publishing Company.
When Thomas agreed to his contract with Doubleday in 1927, he realized that he needed help to continue writing at his current pace. Undoubtedly, he also realized that he would be able to produce more books than ever before with the help of a ghost writer. Thomas successfully created a brand around his name as a travel and adventure writer during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, much in the same way that he branded the *Lowell Thomas Travelogues* with Dale Carnegie during the first half of the 1920s (Carnagey changed his name to Carnegie in 1922). Thus, Thomas recruited Prosper Buranelli to help him write his books for Doubleday, and their relationship continued for the next thirty-four years, until Buranelli’s death in 1960.

Buranelli, who was born in Texas in 1892, had a sixth-grade education and a remarkable mind. He made his way to New York City while he was still in his teens and became a protégé of John O’Hara Cosgrave, editor of the *New York World’s Sunday Magazine*, where he became a feature writer. One of his early assignments was to improve the crossword puzzle, which was introduced to newspapers by Arthur Winn. Buranelli “did not like” the puzzles and found them “beneath a sensible man’s consideration.” He improved the consistency and format of the crossword puzzle, and is credited with vastly increasing their popularity. In 1924, a collection of Buranelli’s crossword puzzles became Simon & Schuster’s first publication, which reached its fiftieth edition before the time of his death.

Buranelli wrote on a variety of subjects, including music, history, philosophy, and politics. His work for the *New York World* included a series of articles concerning Captain John B. L. Noel’s two failed attempts to climb Mount Everest in 1922 and 1924, which undoubtedly attracted Thomas’s attention and convinced him that they would work well together. Buranelli

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126 Typescript of Prosper Buranelli’s obituary, 19 June 1960, Box 68, Folder 7, FCP.
128 Ibid.
worked closely with Thomas on many books, his radio program, Fox Movietone Newsreels, Cinerama productions, and *High Adventure* television series over the course of almost four decades.

Thomas continued to use the same formula to tell his travelogues in book form, as he did when presenting them as a multi-media lecture. He always selected an individual or topic that would allow him to provide his readers with a sense of adventure. He wrote for a wide-range of audiences as well, including children – particularly boys. *The Boy’s Life of Colonel Lawrence* (1927), *Adventure in Afghanistan for Boys* (1928), and *A Trip to New York with Bobby and Betty* (1936) were all intended for children, and showed Thomas’s desire to share his passion for reading, education, and exploration. These books also had the added benefit of allowing him to tap into a wider market.

A majority of the fifty-seven books Thomas published in his lifetime fall into two main categories: biographies and exploration. He was drawn to tell the stories of explorers and war heroes, and his need for adventure drew him to like-minded individuals in his writing. However, there are occasional nods to Thomas’s other interests, such as sports (*Softball! So What?,* 1940), humor (*Tall Stories*, 1931 and *Fan Mail*, 1935), and education (*How to Keep Mentally Fit*, 1940).

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129 The following selection of Thomas’s books features the categories of explorers and war heroes: Felix Graf von Luckner in *The Sea Devil’s Fo’c’l’sle* (1929), which tells of the exploits of the German navy officer while he commanded the S.M.S. Seeadler from 1916 to 1917; George Rogers Clark in *The Hero of Vincennes: The Story of George Rogers Clark* (1929), who an American Revolutionary War hero and the highest ranking officer on the Northwestern frontier; Smedley Butler in *Old Gimlet Eye: The Adventure of General Smedley Butler* (1933), a United States Major General in the Marine Corp who took part in several military actions in Europe, Central America, the Caribbean, and China during WWI; and James Harold “Jimmy” Doolittle, an aviation pioneer, WWII US Army officer, and recipient of the Medal of Honor for his role in the Tokyo Raid of 1942, in *Doolittle: A Biography* (1976). A book featuring exploration was, *The First World Flight* (1929), which included the narratives of the six aviators who completed the first around-the-world flight in 1924. A series of travels books published between 1936 and 1937, featuring various countries, including *Seeing Canada with Lowell Thomas, Seeing India with Lowell Thomas, Seeing Japan with Lowell Thomas*, and *Seeing Mexico with Lowell Thomas.*
A sense of adventure and excitement pervaded all of Thomas’s books. Like his lecture-style travelogues, his books were theatrical in nature. Thomas’s readers experienced acts of a play rather than chapters of a book. Each section provided the reader with a sense of rising action, climax, and resolution. Thomas drew in his audience with a fast-paced narrative, which was always accessible and used familiar language. He used the first person whenever possible in an attempt to make a personal connection with his readers, and his books were always heavily illustrated with photos, maps, and charts; providing a greater interactivity than most books of their time.\(^{130}\)

As noted earlier, on September 30, 1930, Thomas became a radio newscaster on the NBC network.\(^{131}\) He delivered the news to America for fifteen minutes a night, every weeknight, and his news show ran for forty-six continuous years, a record which is unlikely to be broken. In 1930, Thomas was the only radio newsman who “was heard throughout the week.”\(^{132}\) His radio program also used elements from his travelogues and established the news format we see and hear today. Thomas’s radio news contemporaries, Hans von Kaltenborn, Raymond Gram Swing, and Fulton Lewis, Jr., all featured national stories. Thomas broke his program into three news categories: international, national, and local. A typical broadcast began with breaking bulletins or the most important story of the moment, followed by on-going news stories, and when possible he concluded his broadcasts on a humorous note.\(^{133}\) He delivered his stories with a

\(^{130}\) Thomas included phonograph records and film strips in some of his later books to further heighten the experience of his readers. For example, in *A Colorslide Tour of Thailand: Ancient Kingdom: The Many-Splendored Land* (New York: Columbia Record Club, 1961), Thomas’s readers found a set of color slides and a small phonograph record to accompany the text of the book.

\(^{131}\) Thomas’s radio news program was originally referred to as the “Lowell Thomas Literary Digest Broadcast” or the “Lowell Thomas Broadcast for Literary Digest.” Eventually the name of his news show was formalized and it became known as “Lowell Thomas and the News.”


\(^{133}\) Crocker, “Lowell Thomas,” 299.
reassuring authority that made him one of the most popular news broadcasters of his day. Part of his appeal related to the stories he presented about his ongoing world travels and the explorers he introduced on his program such as Felix Von Luckner, Osa Johnson, and Sir Hubert Wilkins. Thomas successfully tied his work on the radio to the many outlets he used or helped develop for his travelogues. However, his radio broadcasts were not filled with the fantastic tales he tended to present in his lectures. Thomas’s news broadcasts primarily consisted of standard stories.

“He was fundamentally a radio reporter with a flair,” but he was also known for making “personal asides.” His audience would hear him diverge significantly from this format when he traveled to Tibet in 1949.

All of Thomas’s travelogues, whether in the form of a multi-media presentation, traditional lecture, or book were presented as non-fiction and it was evident that he wanted to impart new knowledge to his audiences. Like his early travelogues, at the core of all his stories there was an intriguing history. Thomas’s almost manic need to dress these histories in a glitzy wrapping worked well when entertaining an audience, but had many unintended consequences when reporting a serious story; this would become evident in his attempt to raise the nation’s consciousness to what was happening in Tibet.

The Lowell Thomas Travelogues had a major influence on Thomas’s life and career. It was during this time that he established his formula for presenting a story to his audiences. This was also the point in his career that we saw the emergence of Thomas as a philanthropist. He became linked with Arabia in the public mind as he started his world tour. In August of 1921, the Rangoon Times asked Thomas to write a full article on Faisal’s accession to the throne of

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134 Ibid.
135 Bliss, Jr. Now the News, 54.
Iraq. He obliged, and the article contained a genealogy for Faisal, a discussion of geopolitics, and Thomas’s personal memories.\(^{136}\) Thomas remained interested in the Middle East his entire life. He became the director of the American Colony in Jerusalem, supported the Near East College Association, and the Near East Foundation. In the fall of 1975, he would be invited to the White House to discuss a recent visit he had made to the Middle East and to share his views on US Middle East policy with President Ford.\(^{137}\) Due to his philanthropic activities he was welcomed as a guest of honor in Iran, Jordan, and “at Arab-American diplomatic functions in the United States.”\(^{138}\) Thomas was called on many times throughout his long and remarkable career to assist various organizations and individuals in the Middle and Near East, and he did not hesitate to use his fame or fortune (he died a wealthy man) to come to their aid.

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\(^{137}\) Memo from Brent Scowcroft (US National Security Advisor), “MEETING WITH LOWELL THOMAS,” Saturday, November 8, 1975, 10:30 a.m. (The Oval Office). Thomas was invited to the White House to discuss his views on Middle East policy due to his long experience in the Arab world and Israel. The President believed Thomas’s visit to the Middle East was a considerable success as it demonstrated to President Sadat that his relationship with the US has been productive and that he could depend on the US to respond to his urgent economic needs. *Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum*, White House Press Releases, Box 17.

\(^{138}\) Keith, “The Lowell Thomas Papers, Part I,” 34.
CHAPTER TWO

Thomas’s Last Forbidden Land: Three Decades and Three Attempts to Enter Tibet

Travelogues were and are an immensely popular way for audiences to take a virtual journey to exotic lands. In Thomas’s day presenters used lantern slides, motion picture film, music, and other effects to enthrall their audiences in a theater or lecture hall. Today television serves as the primary means for presenting a travelogue. In the United States, many examples of modern travelogues can be seen on the Discovery or the Travel Channels. Michael Palin’s Around the World in 80 Days, Hemingway Adventure, or New Europe were met with enthusiasm by Palin’s fans, as were the television series Rick Steven’s Europe, Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations, By Any Means, and An Idiot Abroad. What has become a documentary or ethnographic film featuring travel started as a live lecture and in Thomas’s case, a multi-media extravaganza.

It took decades for what was arguably Thomas’s most significant travelogue to come to fruition. He had fantasized about traveling to Tibet when he was a child and as an adult his burgeoning career as a travelogue lecturer kept his dream alive. Tibet was considered the mecca for world travelers and Thomas was building his reputation as an explorer. Traveling to Tibet became more than a personal goal for Thomas; it also represented a professional achievement that would establish him as one of the great lecturers and explorers of his day.¹ This chapter will discuss Thomas’s efforts to travel to Tibet throughout his career, the political issues surrounding his requests, and how his mindset concerning Tibet changed.

¹ Lowell Thomas has been recognized by various organizations as a preeminent explorer. The most prominent of these is the Explorers Club, which has presented the Lowell Thomas Award to “outstanding explorers” since 1980. The Lowell Thomas Award, https://explorers.org/about/history/the.lowell.thomas.award.
Thomas first seriously considered Tibet as a subject of a travelogue in 1919, while he was touring with the *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia* lecture in the United States. While Thomas was in Washington, DC, he was approached by Dr. Paul Samuel Reinsch, the US Minister to China. Reinsch asked Thomas if he would consider producing a travelogue featuring China. Thomas was interested, but he believed that the expense would be too great unless the US government provided all of the transportation and paid a portion of the overall expenses to produce the travelogue. Reinsch assured Thomas that this could be arranged. 2 Shortly after this conversation, in August of 1919, Reinsch resigned from his post. In his efforts to advance US economic interests and forestall the expansion of Japanese influence in Asia, Reinsch overextended his authority with China, ultimately provoking Japan into demanding the leadership role in guiding China’s entry into WWI, an action the US government wanted to avoid. 3 A year or so later Reinsch took a position as a counselor to the Chinese government. Thomas received a letter from Beijing in late 1921 or early 1922 requesting that he accompany an expedition to Lhasa if appropriate permission could be obtained for him. Thomas was interested in going, but was already committed to his *Through Romantic India* travelogue tour. Due to this, and a tragic turn of events, Thomas never received permission to visit Lhasa. In the fall of 1922, while traveling in southern China, Reinsch became ill and was diagnosed with encephalitis and pneumonia. He died a few months later on January 26, 1923, 4 and Reinsch’s death was the end of Thomas’s first opportunity to go to Lhasa. It is also probable that Reinsch once again overextended his authority and would have never been able to get Thomas into Lhasa.

2 Ibid., 6.
Thomas was not able to travel to Lhasa, but he did not give up on the idea of presenting a travelogue featuring Tibet. In 1924, he partnered with Captain John Noel, the mountaineer who went on two expeditions to Mount Everest, and Sir Francis Edward Younghusband, the British Army officer and explorer, who led an expedition to Tibet in 1903. The production company was named Lowell Thomas – Captain Noel Limited, and was intended to create film and travelogue productions of travel and exploration. Thomas, Noel, and Younghusband created a proposal for the lecture that included a budget, a draft of a script, and advertising samples. The script, entitled “Through Mysterious Tibet to the World’s Highest Mountain” featured Noel’s expeditions to Mount Everest and used Tibet and Nepal, the “forbidden lands,” as the backdrop for the story. The people of Tibet and Nepal, and their customs, were integral to the script. It included, as well, references to Rudyard Kipling’s novel Kim, which is the first example of Thomas portraying Tibet as otherworldly.

Kim is set in the 1890s, during the political conflict between the Russian and the British Empires in Central Asia. The main character, Kimball O’Hara (Kim), leads a vagabond existence in India and befriends a Tibetan lama who is on a quest to free himself from the “Wheel of Things.” Kim becomes caught up in an adventure with the lama and ultimately has to decide if he will follow the path of “The Great Game” (the rivalry between Britain and Russia for supremacy in Central Asia) or if he will follow the spiritual way of Tibetan Buddhism.

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5 “Climbing Mount Everest,” Box 501, Folder 8, LTP. The source included a detailed fourteen-page proposal with the name of the production company.
6 Ibid. A detailed fourteen-page proposal that explained the potential interest in such a travelogue, the cost to produce it, and the likely monetary returns investors could expect to see. The advertising samples included press releases, broadsides, and newspapers inserts.
7 Ibid.
8 Rudyard Kipling’s novel Kim was first published as a serial in McClure’s Magazine from December 1900 to October 1901. It was first published in book form in October of 1901 by Macmillan & Co. Ltd.
9 John Bowker, "Samsāra." Encyclopedia.com. (from The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions, 1997), March 31, 2014, http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O101-Sasra.html. The “Wheel of Things” is also known as Samsāra, a Buddhist concept meaning a cyclic existence, in which there is a recurring cycle of birth and death that is caused by individuals obsessing over their life experiences.
Thomas would make similar literary allusions to James Hilton’s 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, when presenting his travelogues after his 1949 expedition to Tibet.

A tour of “Through Mysterious Tibet to the World’s Highest Mountain” was proposed to run from July of 1924 through the spring of 1925. A draft schedule included stops in Europe, North America, India, Australia, and other parts of the world, but the tour never came to fruition. There is no evidence that funding was ever secured for the travelogue and there are a variety of other reasons why the Lowell Thomas – Captain Noel Limited production was never realized. Noel acted as the photographic expert for the British 1924 expedition to climb Mount Everest. What was anticipated to be one of the great expeditions of its day ended in tragedy when George Mallory and Andrew Irvine were lost during the last stage of the climb to the summit of Everest. Mallory’s remains were recovered in 1999, but Irvine’s body has never been found. Noel recorded footage of the pair within 600 feet of Everest’s summit and some experts still argue that Mallory and Irvine were the first to make it to the top of Mount Everest, not Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, who accomplished this feat in 1953. This disaster may have dissuaded Thomas from going forward with the tour. It was also not Thomas’s adventure and it would have potentially diminished his reputation as an explorer to be presenting another explorer’s material. Another aspect of the reasoning that led Thomas to abandon the project was that he played little to no role in gathering the still photographs and motion picture film. Younghusband and Noel were responsible for bringing back “unique material” and a “spectacular record of the

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10 “Climbing Mount Everest,” proposed travelogue tour schedule for “Through Mysterious Tibet to the World’s Highest Mountain” Box 501, Folder 8, LTP.
11 “Head Hunters and Mountaineers.” *New York Times*, March 23, 1927, 19. A brief article that highlighted the film “The Epic of Everest” during a US film tour. The film was shown in New York City at the Fifth Avenue Playhouse on April 3, 1927.
Expedition to the summit of the highest mountain in the world.”¹² Thomas was following the advice he shared with Yeats-Brown; it was necessary to personally gather the materials for a travelogue for a production to have a chance at success.

Noel suffered a severe personal and professional blow from the disastrous expedition. He had become friends with Mallory and had hoped to see his colleague become the first person to make it to the summit of Mount Everest. Noel had also invested his money and reputation in this expedition, and had expected to recoup his investment with a travelogue portraying a successful ascent of Everest.¹³ In an effort to salvage what he could from his expedition he established Explorer Films and set about editing his footage and released The Epic of Everest in November of 1924. Taking a page from Thomas’s book, Noel turned his lecture tour in London into a theatrical event. He was joined by seven lamas during his lecture and a set was created based on his photographs, which depicted Tibetan temples in the foreground and the snow covered peaks of Mount Everest in the background. Special lighting effects were developed to illuminate the mountains and, as the lights dimmed, the orchestra played Tibetan music on traditional instruments, and the doors to the “temple” swung open to reveal the theater’s screen.¹⁴ The Epic of Everest featured Tibetans and their culture and religion, but the focus of the story was Mallory’s and Irvine’s attempt to climb Everest. Noel toured the United Kingdom, Germany, and North America from 1924 through 1927, until public interest in Everest began to wane. In 1927, he also published his account of the expedition in Through Tibet to Everest.¹⁵ The United Kingdom edition of Noel’s book bears a similar name to the proposed title of the Thomas-Noel

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¹² Climbing Mount Everest,” proposed travelogue tour schedule for “Through Mysterious Tibet to the World’s Highest Mountain” Box 501, Folder 8, LTP.
¹³ Sandra Noel, Everest Pioneer: The Photographs of Captain John Noel (United Kingdom: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2003), 164. Sandra Noel is the daughter of Captain John Noel.
¹⁴ Noel, Everest Pioneer, 164-171.
travelogue, “Through Mysterious Tibet to the World’s Highest Mountain.” However, the US edition, which was published the same year, was retitled *The Story of Everest*.\(^{16}\) Publishing houses, during the 1920s and today, did not hesitate to rename a book to suit an audience, but it may have also been a nod to Thomas who still was hoping to do his own Tibet travelogue.

Thomas and Noel remained friends throughout their lives and their mutual interest in the Himalayas and Tibet was a common bond. Noel wrote to Thomas over the years regarding various projects and arranged for his wife and daughter to meet the Thomases.\(^{17}\) Noel also communicated with Thomas regarding a fundraising event intended to help orphaned and displaced children from Tibet. The event was billed as “Tibet Day” and Noel presented a lecture entitled “Through Tibet to Everest.” The proceeds were raised for Dr. Graham’s Homes in Kilimpong.\(^{18}\) Noel noted that “‘Tibet Day’ was a great success… sent a cheque [sic] for £1,000 to the Tibet Children’s Schools at Kalimpong.”\(^{19}\) Noel’s fascination with Mount Everest continued through the end of his life. In 1978, he wrote to Thomas with the idea of producing a lecture tour that would feature past expeditions to Everest.\(^{20}\) Thomas was eighty-six and Noel was eighty-eight.

While Noel was presenting his Everest travelogue Thomas had immersed himself in writing books and articles, and presenting various lectures and travelogues around the US. By 1949 he had established himself as one of the major figures in the rapidly changing media industry. In 1934, he became the voice of Fox Movietone newsreels, expanding his influence


\(^{17}\) John Noel to Lowell Thomas, 10 September 1964, Box 1053, Folder 57, LTP.

\(^{18}\) Dr. Graham’s Homes, Kilimpong was founded in 1900 by Reverend John Anderson Graham, who was a missionary of the Church of Scotland. Graham settled in Kilimpong and opened an institution to care for orphaned or displaced Eurasian children.

\(^{19}\) John Noel to Lowell Thomas, 1 October 1962, Box 1053, Folder 57, LTP. Noel’s letter included a “Tibet Day” program. The program had a note scribbled on it from Noel indicating the event was a success.

\(^{20}\) John Noel to Lowell Thomas, 8 June 1978, Box 106, Folder 15, LTP. Noel suggested starting a lecture tour in London based on past expeditions to Mount Everest.
through the use of movie theaters to present news stories across the US. At 6:45 p.m. on February 21, 1940, Thomas aired the first regularly scheduled television news program (and the first simulcast) by broadcasting his news show on NBC’s television and radio networks. He continued this for a year until the television industry was forced to scale back its operations and broadcasting to conserve raw materials for WWII. Thomas found that he did not like being tied to a studio in New York City, preferring to broadcast remotely from the field or his home in Pawling, NY, so he avoided working on television for almost two decades after this experience.

Thomas’s work during this period in his career left him little time to pursue the development of new travelogues. However, he remained as opportunistic as ever and gathered material for stories when he was out in the field on other assignments. His continued interest in Tibet was known to his radio listening audience and he was considered something of an expert on the region. However, it would be a few more years before he would have another chance to visit his last forbidden land. In 1945, Thomas was one of many war correspondents covering the end of WWII. During April, May, and June he reported on events in Europe and the Pacific. Starting in London, he traveled across Europe broadcasting wartime news and his experiences overseas. In early April his news program aired from the B.B.C.’s underground studios in London. On April 24th, he was in Berlin, broadcasting directly to New York City from a radio station that had been used by the Nazis during the Battle of Berlin. During this report Thomas

\[1\] Bliss, *Now the News*, 219.

\[22\] Thomas was a devotee of remote broadcasting for two main reasons: it allowed him the freedom to continue his travels and he enjoyed speaking to his audience from unusual locations. This practice began a year or so before Thomas had started his radio news program. A parachute jumper was heard on NBC on August 29, 1929, and CBS claims to have performed a similar stunt earlier. See Edward Bliss’s *Now the News* for further details.

\[23\] H. DeLong (a photographer from Washington, DC) to Lowell Thomas, 20 August 1938, Box 156, folder 9, FCP. DeLong was requesting information from Thomas concerning Tibet for a project he was completing for the “National Museum.”
described a flight over Germany, during which he “witnessed some of the fighting at Berlin
today, and with my own eyes saw the city in flames, saw the bombardment going on between the
Russians and the Nazis.” After reporting from Europe, Thomas continued his duties as a war
correspondent as he traveled across Northern Africa, the Middle East, and by June of 1945 he
was flying over Asia.

On June 6th, Thomas aired a broadcast about his experiences in Chongqing, China and an
interview he conducted with Chiang Kai-shek. He met with Chiang for about an hour on June
1st. Thomas told Chiang that he hoped “to get a more accurate picture of the Generalissimo and
China” to more precisely comment on what was happening in China for his news program.
Chiang provided general answers to Thomas’s questions through an interpreter and concluded
the interview by thanking Thomas and said “he was confident that the accomplishment of a close
Chinese-American relationship would be realized.” Thomas apparently had technical
difficulties while broadcasting from China. He had been told the Chinese International
Broadcasting station was powerful enough to reach the US, but he later discovered that his
broadcasts were only reaching about half of China.

Thomas crisscrossed his way over China during June of 1945, including flying over “The
Hump.” (World War II Allied pilots referred to the flight path over the eastern end of the

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24 Transcript of Thomas’s radio broadcast, “Scripts (Radio)”, 24 April 1945, Box 429, LTP. On April 22, 1945
Heinrich Himmler made an offer of German surrender to the Western Allies, but not to the Soviet Union. On the
same day, Hitler conceded defeat from his underground bunker after learning that one of his generals, Felix Steiner,
could not launch a successful counter-attack on the Soviet Army, which had just invaded Germany.
25 “Sun’s War Correspondent,” Our Sun 11, no. 2 (May 1945): 17, Box 518, Folder 4, LTP. Our Sun was the
“family news magazine of the Sun Oil Company.” Sun Oil was Thomas’s main sponsor at this time. This article
described some of Thomas’s broadcasting experiences during the end of WWII.
26 Radio broadcast transcript, 6 June, 1945, Box 519, Folder 2, LTP.
27 Minutes of Meeting with the Generalissimo, Chiang Kai-shek, 01 June 1945, Box 520, Folder 2, LTP.
28 Ibid.
29 Radio broadcast transcript, 12 June, 1945, Box 519, Folder 2, LTP. Thomas commented about his troubles
broadcasting from the Chinese International Broadcasting station.
Himalayan Mountains as “The Hump.”) Military transport aircraft used this treacherous route to resupply Chiang Kai-shek’s war effort and the US Army Air Force units based in China. Thomas was traveling with an American army colonel, a Chinese man familiar with the region, and two Tibetans who lived near the base of Gongga Shan, the highest mountain in Sichuan province, China, on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau. The mission of the flight was to purchase horses near the Chinese side of Tibet to serve as pack animals. Horses played an important role in transporting supplies to the Chinese and American troops in areas where roads were impassable by motorized vehicles. The crew Thomas flew with was preparing for the final push to overwhelm Japan. Thomas, inspired by the flight and his proximity to Tibet, initiated another round of gathering information and stories about the region. Thomas commented in one of his radio broadcasts that he was unable to capture any motion picture film because it was too dark, but he hoped to have “much more” to tell his listeners about Tibet during “another visit to the Tibetan Border, and beyond, I hope.” Thomas’s near miss appeared to be heightening his determination to visit the region and added to the mystery of Tibet for his listeners.

Thomas told his “Trip to Chinese Tibet” story during a radio broadcast in June of 1945 and he also turned this experience into a film script. In both formats the two Tibetans that traveled with his party were featured as comic relief. In the radio broadcast “Donga” and “Gunga” were commended for their local knowledge and providing aid to American and Chinese troops, but they end up being the butt of more than one joke. Thomas wrote, “They had never been in an airplane before. You should have seen the expressions on their faces when we took off from Sichong [Schicheng]… and when we landed. Donga, as soon as he got out of the plane,

30 An undated radio broadcast transcript entitled “Trip to Chinese Tibet,” Box 520, Folder 10, LTP. The broadcast must have aired in early June of 1945, based on the activities Thomas was describing.
31 Ibid., 6.
leaped and cavorted, waving his arms like a ballet russe\textsuperscript{32} toe dancer, as though he himself had sprouted wings and could fly from now on.”\textsuperscript{33} In the film script the US army officer, Colonel Dan Mallon, is turned into a Lawrence-like figure. He had an in-depth knowledge of the people and the region, and he was responsible for bringing aid to the troops on wild horses from the Himalayas. In a tense moment during the flight over the Hump, the pilot of the plane informs the crew they might have to bail out due to the severe weather. After checking the parachutes they find they are two short. The pilot thinks a moment, smiles, and says, “Ah, I have it. If we have to abandon ship I’ll just open the door, call the Tibetans over and say: ‘Here we are, boys. Here’s your home. But, look out for that first step!’”\textsuperscript{34} Thomas kept a record of individuals he thought he could include in his stories (humorous or serious) and he was particularly drawn to the Tibetans he met while he was in China. He appeared to find them to be a good source of entertainment for his anecdotes.\textsuperscript{35}

Thomas’s travelogues portrayed the many ethnic groups and exotic cultures he encountered from the culturally biased point of view of white superiority that was prevalent in the US at the time of his early productions. His WWI era journals are filled with stories he intended to use in his early travelogues. A section labeled “Negro Troops” exemplified the widespread degradation black US soldiers suffered during this time and included several anecdotes in which they are the subject of jokes featuring racial stereotypes.\textsuperscript{36} In one story, two “naval officers” discussed the fun and excitement they would have if any submarines suddenly

\textsuperscript{32} Thomas’s “russe toe dancer” comment apparently referred to the Ballet Russes, which was a ballet company that was organized by the Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev and opened to great popularity in Paris in 1909.
\textsuperscript{33} Undated radio broadcast transcript, p. 5, Box 520, Folder 10, LTP.
\textsuperscript{34} Film Script, (untitled), c. 1941-1945, p. 13, Box 519, Folder 6, LTP. Based on the re-telling of the story from the 1945 radio broadcast transcript, the film script was written sometime in June or soon after in 1945.
\textsuperscript{35} Journal, 06 May-07 June, Box 522, Folder 8, LTP. Thomas kept anecdotes about many of the Tibetans he met in 1945.
\textsuperscript{36} Journal notebook: France, circa 1917-1918. Box 495, Folder 9, LTP. Thomas made notes for a wide variety of stories in his journals. He often looked for humorous stories to intersperse throughout his lectures.
emerged, and the “colored chap” who happened to be nearby “turned from dark dusky yellow to sickly green + rolled his eyes” and exclaimed “Lord man… don’t wish fo [sic] no sport like dat [sic].” Other stories refer to a “colored chap” strumming a guitar “while signing southern melodies” and a black soldier who Thomas refers to as “Sambo.” Later, he used the literary personification of the noble savage in his travelogues and he often did so throughout his career. His Allenby-Lawrence travelogue was an excellent example of this and decades later he was using the same storytelling techniques during his “High Adventure with Lowell Thomas” television series. His “Australian Outback” episode, which aired in 1958, featured a hunt for the remains of the explorer Harold Bell Lasseter who claimed to have discovered a huge gold deposit in central Australia. Aborigines were heavily featured in the television program and they were continually described as functioning on “instinct” alone in their efforts to assist Thomas. Once again, he was reflecting the cultural biases of his time – telling his story through the lens of white superiority. Thomas introduced his audiences to exotic cultures, but to what effect? His travelogues were primarily entertainment. They exposed audiences to cultures they knew little about, but his portrayal of black troops during WWI, Arabian Bedouins, and Australian Aborigines rendered them as little more than primitive warriors that needed white men to lead them. The cultural and ethnic differences Thomas presented to his predominantly white audiences did not serve to connect them to these different cultures, but merely injected humor into the stories he presented.

It is often difficult to separate Thomas’s personal and professional lives, but he was not outwardly racist to the countless people he met and no matter their race, gender, or culture, he

37 Ibid.
38 High Adventure with Lowell Thomas – Australian Outback, Box 1902, Folder 27, LTP. The “Australian Outback” episode was written by Prosper Buranelli, but Thomas certainly had creative control over his television series.
Thomas and his wife would use derogatory terms of the time in correspondence when referring to other ethnic groups and cultures, but they enjoyed traveling and experiencing new people. Thomas was exposed to a broad cross-section of humanity as a child growing up in a gold mining town and he experienced a wide variety of cultures as an adult. Although he was more liberal minded when personally dealing with non-whites than many Caucasians of his generation, he frequently portrayed other ethnicities and cultures using what amounted to a racial stratification. However, it is important to consider Thomas’s actions separately from his intentions, as Lawrence did. Thomas used racially biased stories as a means to elicit a humorous response from his audiences, but racial bias did not appear as frequently in his personal life. Thomas used the ethnic stereotypes of his time for his benefit, and he may have believed he was justified in doing so since he was often self-deprecating in his humor. However, using these unfortunate storytelling methods resulted in unwanted consequences for Thomas. His historical memory is now tarnished, but what is even more relevant to this history, is that his Tibet travelogues were not taken as serious news in part because of his portrayal of many of the Tibetans he met.

Thomas noted ideas and stories for his travelogues in a WWII era pocket journal just as he did during WWI. He was constantly on the lookout for story ideas. He also made notes for his radio broadcasts and he had a remarkable ability to handwrite a draft of a broadcast in a single sitting. Thomas was also noting possible lecture and travelogue themes in his journals. He listed nineteen possible topics including his “final day in Paris,” which would eventually be written as Thomas’s biography of General James Harold Doolittle, the American aviation pioneer. Over half of the topics Thomas listed involved his experiences during his Pacific trip,

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39 This observation was based on conversations with members of the Thomas family and acquaintances of Thomas from Pawling, NY.
particularly his time in China and the Himalayas.  

Thomas also took advantage of his connections in the military while he was overseas and collected restricted reports from the India China Division of Air Transport Command concerning pilots who crashed while flying over the Himalayas, and the stories describing how they survived the ordeal. Thomas continued to gather materials from exotic people and cultures to feature in his stories during his time in the Pacific, but he was never able to make it past the borders of Tibet while he was in India or China to personally gather the film, photographs, and stories he wanted for a travelogue on this “forbidden land.” Tibet became an elusive prize, the one location that was always out of reach.

Thomas did not give up hope, but a heavy workload, world travel, and business ventures limited the time he could spend attempting to gain permission to visit Lhasa. It was in May of 1949, twenty-seven years after his first attempt to enter Tibet, when Thomas made what he considered his last and best effort to arrange an expedition to Lhasa. His radio news show was due to take a ten week hiatus starting on July 2, 1949, the first extended break he had from his radio duties in decades. He began thinking about the “forbidden lands” he had visited and Tibet still represented a serious void to Thomas as an explorer. He contacted Loy W. Henderson, the US Ambassador to India from 1948 to 1951, one of the many friends Thomas had made during his travels. Thomas congratulated him on his appointment as ambassador and added in a postscript: “Now that you are in Hindustan, a land of miracles, how about performing a miracle? How about arranging for me, my son and three other Americans to visit Tibet? Is

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40 Journal, 09-26 June 1945, Box 522, Folder 9, LTP. Thomas kept several journals while acting as a war correspondent during WWII.
41 Himalayas, 1945, Box 519 Folder 9, LTP. Thomas managed to get several copies of restricted reports from the Headquarters of the India China Division Air Transport Command and a copy of A Short History of Search and Rescue Activities in ICD-ATC, dated 15 January 1945.
there any hope?"43 Henderson forwarded the request to Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai, who was appointed the first Secretary General in the Ministry of External Affairs after India won its independence from Britain in 1947. Henderson requested that a telegram be sent “to the Indian representative in Lhasa [Hugh E. Richardson] asking him to discuss the matter with the Tibetan Government.”44 He wrote that he wanted to do everything possible to help Thomas, and he noted that Thomas and Richardson had a mutual friend in Suydam Cutting, who had visited Lhasa in 1935.45 Henderson hoped this would aid Thomas in his efforts to obtain permission to enter Tibet.

The initial response from H. Dayal, the political officer in Tibet, was not encouraging. He replied that it was “extremely unlikely” that Thomas would be granted permission to visit Tibet. Similar recent requests had been denied; even appeals to travel in the Chumbi Valley (the valley between Tibet and Sikkim, Bhutan, and China) were being turned down. Marco Pallis, who wrote about the religion and culture of Tibet, and Frank Ludlow, a British officer who was previously stationed at the British Mission in Lhasa, also had their requests to visit Tibet rejected. Both men were known and well regarded by Tibetan officials. However, Henderson persevered and Hugh E. Richardson, a British diplomat and Tibetologist, who represented Britain in Lhasa at the time, was “asked to make informal soundings” on Thomas’s behalf.46

Richardson did not want to make inquiries of any kind for Thomas unless pressed to do so by Henderson. He believed that “in the present circumstances the request of Lowell Thomas

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44 Loy W. Henderson to Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai, New Delhi, India, 2 June 1949. Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Henderson contacted Bajpai within a day or two after he received Thomas’s message requesting entry into Tibet.
45 Ibid.
46 K. P. S. [Kumara Padmanabha Sivasankara] Menon to Loy Henderson, 11 June 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Menon was a long-time member of the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Foreign Service. After India won its independence from Britain in 1947 he was appointed India’s first Foreign Secretary (1948 to 1952).
is certain to be unwelcome to the Tibetan Government.\textsuperscript{47} During the period from 1912 to 1950, Tibet enjoyed a \textit{de facto} independence from China and remained closed to the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{48} In 1949, Tibet was witnessing the rise of communism in China and feared that Mao Zedong would turn his attention to Lhasa and the rest of the region. All Chinese citizens in Tibet who were connected with China’s government were being expelled and Tibet’s government was wary of allowing any foreigners past its borders. Thus, Richardson had good reason to think that Thomas’s request would be promptly denied.

Henderson persisted with Thomas’s request and encouraged Richardson to contact Tsepon Shakabpa, the Finance Minister of the Government of Tibet. Henderson provided Richardson with a letter from himself to Shakabpa. This allowed Richardson to divest himself from a situation that clearly put him in an uncomfortable position.\textsuperscript{49} Henderson wanted to follow protocol by submitting his request through the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, but he also realized that going through Richardson was the quickest method for relaying Thomas’s appeal. The mail service to Tibet was unreliable and the only telegraph communication to the region was through the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.\textsuperscript{50} Henderson believed that Shakabpa would be willing to listen to his request because they had met in New Delhi earlier in the year and were on good terms. Henderson presented Thomas to Shakabpa in very favorable terms. He described Thomas as “one of the most prominent radio news broadcasters in the United States and my close friend” and “a distinguished citizen of high standing and a gentleman of experience and

\textsuperscript{47} K. P. S. Menon to Loy W. Henderson, 14 June 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
\textsuperscript{48} S. L. Kuzmin, \textit{Hidden Tibet: History of Independence and Occupation}, edited by Andrey Terentyev, translated by Dmitry Bennett, (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2011), 488-493. The 13\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama had declared Tibet’s independence in 1913 after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912.
\textsuperscript{49} Loy W. Henderson to K. P. S. Menon, 16 June 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Henderson’s letter was extremely polite, but insistent that Richardson contact Tibetan officials in Lhasa.
\textsuperscript{50} Loy W. Henderson to Lowell Thomas, 20 June 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Henderson commented that he had no choice but to go through Richardson if the request were to reach Tibet in a timely manner.
discretion.”

Henderson also noted that Shakabpa and Thomas were both acquainted with Sudyam Cutting. Henderson explained that Thomas was “anxious to make a personal friendly visit to Lhasa in July, with his son and four other American companions” because he “has been interested for many years in Tibet and Buddhism.” Thomas was certainly motivated to visit Tibet, and undoubtedly Shakabpa began thinking of how a prominent newsman from the US would be able to help Tibet in its hour of need. However, at this point in the discussion of allowing Thomas to travel to Lhasa, he was only interested in making the trip as an explorer, not as an unofficial diplomat.

Henderson wrote to Thomas in late June explaining that the outlook for his request to visit Tibet was bleak, but that he had not “completely abandoned hope.” Thomas remained optimistic in his response to Henderson. He revealed that Suydam Cutting was his motivation to request permission to visit Lhasa at this time. Cutting believed that the political fall-out in China and other communist countries would make the timing of Thomas’s request to visit Tibet ideal. He believed that the Tibetan government would welcome the opportunity to “establish friendly relations with America.” Cutting’s understanding of the situation was excellent and he would continue to play an important role in Thomas’s efforts to gain entry to Tibet. Thomas was less astute than Cutting regarding the urgency of Tibet’s situation. He hoped his 1949 request would be successful, but Thomas was willing to wait a year if Henderson needed more time to make the case for his request.
Nevertheless, Thomas realized that his window of opportunity was rapidly closing during the summer of 1949, and he kept receiving conflicting reports on the likelihood of his request to visit Tibet. However, not willing to concede defeat without taking full advantage of his contacts in the Indian government, he wrote directly to Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai, on June 22nd requesting his help.\(^{58}\) While waiting for a reply from Bajpai, Thomas received discouraging news from Henderson on June 27\(^{th}\). Tsepon Shakabpa’s response to his request was that he would ascertain if a “visit is possible for Lowell Thomas and party.”\(^{59}\) Thomas was on the verge of giving up hope. He responded to Henderson on June 29\(^{th}\) and thanked him for all of his efforts on his behalf. Thomas conceded that he might have to put off his Tibet expedition “for a year or two,” but he wondered if there was anything more he could do to help his cause. He was willing to visit India and he suggested having his son, Lowell Thomas, Jr., who was currently filming a documentary in Iran, visit Bajpai.\(^{60}\) A few days later, Thomas received his first glimmer of hope. Bajpai’s response was encouraging. He confirmed that his office had forwarded US Ambassador Henderson’s request on Thomas’s behalf to Lhasa. Bajpai hoped to have permission for Thomas to visit Tibet in 1949.\(^{61}\)

Bajpai was apparently aware that momentum was swinging Thomas’s way in Lhasa. In spite of Shakabpa’s neutral response to Henderson, he was trying to convince the Tibetan government to allow Thomas to visit his homeland. After great difficulty he succeeded in obtaining permission for Thomas and his son to visit Lhasa, but he did not receive approval for

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\(^{58}\) Sir Girija S. Bajpai to Lowell Thomas, 29 June 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.

\(^{59}\) Loy W. Henderson to Lowell Thomas, 27 June 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Henderson transcribed the message he received from Shakabpa on June 24\(^{th}\) in his letter to Thomas.

\(^{60}\) Lowell Thomas to Loy W. Henderson, 29 June, 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.

\(^{61}\) Loy W. Henderson to Lowell Thomas, 27 June 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
Thomas’s four “American companions” to enter Tibet. Shakabpa informed Henderson that the Tibetan government received many requests from foreign nationals to visit Tibet and granting permission from one country over another would put the Tibetan government in a delicate position. Based on Henderson’s recommendation the Tibetan government was willing to make “a very special case” to allow Thomas and his son to visit Lhasa. Thomas, or Henderson on Thomas’s behalf, would need to formally apply to the Tibetan Government Foreign Office in Lhasa, providing details of the trip in order to receive the necessary permits to enter Tibet. Thomas and Lowell, Jr. were to enter Tibet by the Nathula Pass via Gangtok, Sikkim. Shakabpa specifically noted that his name needed to be mentioned on the official application. Henderson and Shakabpa were being held responsible for Thomas’s expedition to Tibet by the Tibetan government. Dean Acheson, the US Secretary of State, submitted the formal application via the American Embassy in New Delhi for Thomas and his son to enter the region and travel to Lhasa.

Approval from Lhasa for Thomas and Lowell, Jr. to visit Tibet was sent to Henderson on July 5th and he relayed this message by mail to Thomas’s home in Pawling, NY on July 7th. The State Department was also informed that Thomas’s request to enter Tibet was approved. A few days before Henderson’s message arrived, Thomas received a telephone call on July 10th from Elbert G. Mathews, who at the time was the Chief of the Division of South Asian Affairs in

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62 Loy W. Henderson to Tsepon Shakabpa, 29 June 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. The letter described the difficulties involved in receiving permission for Thomas to visit Tibet.
63 K. P. S. Menon to Loy W. Henderson, 5 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. The letter included a transcription of Tsepon Shakabpa’s message granting the Thomases permission to enter Lhasa.
64 Telegram from Dean Acheson, of the US State Department, to the American Embassy in New Delhi, India. Sent 14 July 1949, received 15 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
65 Loy W. Henderson to Lowell Thomas, 7 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Henderson included a copy of the message from Tsepon Shakabpa approving Thomas’s request to visit Tibet.
the State Department, notifying him that his request had been granted. Before sending out a flurry of letters to begin his arrangements for his trip, Thomas sent his son the following telegram:

THE MIRACLE HAS HAPPENED PERMISSION HAS JUST COME THROUGH VIA DELHI BUT ONLY FOR YOU AND ME HOWEVER WILL TRY AND ARRANGE FOR JOHNNY [Johnny Roberts, who was working as a photographer for Lowell Thomas, Jr.] HOPE TO LEAVE HERE PANAMERICAN JULY NINETEENTH ARRIVING CALCUTTA TWENTYSECOND CAN YOU BOTH MEET ME THERE THAT WEEKEND CABLE IMMEDIATELY

DAD

Thomas wanted to contact Lowell, Jr. as soon as possible to arrange for his son to go to Calcutta in advance of his arrival to start making preparations for their trek into Tibet.

Thomas was surprised that his request was approved. He believed that there was only a marginal chance he would receive permission to travel to Tibet in 1949 due to the time consuming bureaucracy involved in processing his request. He had even planned a camping trip with former President Herbert Hoover, who was a close friend of Thomas’s, and General Lucius D. Clay, who had just retired as the Commander-in-Chief of US Forces in Europe. Thomas had to scramble to make plans for his radio show, which would come off of hiatus while he was abroad, and to make his preparations for the long journey to Lhasa. His most immediate and

66 Thomas, So Long Until Tomorrow, 137. Also see, Letter from Lowell Thomas to Consul General (Calcutta) Charles H. Derry, 14 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Thomas commented in his letter that he was contacted by Mr. Elbert Mathews from the State Department.
67 Lowell Thomas to Lowell Thomas, Jr., 11-18 July 1949, Box 469, Folder 1, LTP. The “miracle” telegram was sent on 11 July 1949.
68 Lowell Thomas to Charles H. Derry, American Consul General, US – Calcutta, Box 476, Folder 6 LTP. Thomas commented on the speed of events and that he wanted contact his son quickly, so that he knew to travel to Calcutta.
69 Lowell Thomas to Loy W. Henderson, 14 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
pressing concern was to locate his son. Lowell, Jr. was traveling from Tehran to Isfahan for his work and his father hoped to contact him through John C. Wiley, the US Ambassador to Iran.  

Lowell Thomas, Jr. was heavily influenced by his father’s work and he shared his father’s passion for travel. He was surprised and excited to receive his father’s telegram. He had discussed the possibility of traveling to Tibet with his father, but he did not believe it was likely that the trip would be possible. He was not involved with obtaining the permissions to enter Tibet, but he was pleased to be able to leave “the hot barren plains of Iran” to go to Calcutta to begin preparations for their journey to Lhasa.  

Lowell, Jr. was twenty-five during the summer of 1949, and he had already experienced many adventures around the world. He was raised in Dutchess County, New York where he was exposed to the many well-known explorers, writers, artists, military, and political figures who frequented his parents’ estate. Lowell, Sr. arranged for his son to work as an assistant to a Fox Movietone cameraman at the age of fifteen. During this experience Lowell, Jr. sailed on the USS San Francisco around the coast of South America and his photographs and motion picture film were later featured at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. The fair was also his first appearance as a lecturer. Lowell, Jr. entered the Taft Preparatory School in Connecticut in the fall of 1939. During the summer of 1940, he accompanied the explorer Bradford Washburn on an expedition to Alaska to study glaciology. The following summer he accompanied the explorer Erling Strom on trip through the Canadian Rockies.

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70 Lowell Thomas to Charles H. Derry, 14 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
71 Thomas, Jr., Out of This World, 13-14.
72 Lowell Thomas, Jr. – Biographical Sketch, Box 863, Folder 1, LTP.
73 Lowell Thomas, Jr. interview, May 13, 2009, 34.
74 Lowell Thomas, Jr. – Biographical Sketch, Box 863, Folder 1, LTP.
Lowell, Jr. entered Dartmouth College during the summer of 1942 and later that year he joined the US Army Air Forces.\textsuperscript{75} While in the Air Forces he became a pilot-instructor and taught members of the Free French Army to fly during the tail-end of WWII. In 1946, he became an official photographer for the US Air Force and documented the Bikini Atom Bomb Test in the Pacific. Following the atom bomb test he flew around the world with the United States Secretary of the Air Force, Stuart Symington.\textsuperscript{76}

In the fall of 1946, Lowell, Jr. returned to Dartmouth and in the summer of 1947 he worked as an assistant to the economist Max Weston Thornburg. His work with Thornburg played a role in the subsequent political and economic reorganization in Turkey. While completing his final year at Dartmouth he competed nationally on the ski team and presented lectures across the US. Shortly after graduating he returned to work for Thornburg and traveled with him to Iran.\textsuperscript{77} Thornburg, who was the former vice president of the Bahrein Petroleum Company, was named special assistant to the Under Secretary of State by Secretary of State Cordell Hull in 1941. He was charged with keeping the State Department informed concerning issues involving petroleum supplies overseas during WWII.\textsuperscript{78} Thornburg was returning to the Middle East when Lowell, Jr. began working for him as part of an economic study Thornburg was conducting.\textsuperscript{79} While in Iran and Turkey Lowell, Jr. found the time to collect materials for travelogues he presented on a US tour during the winter of 1948-49. His lectures were entitled “A Flight Around the World” and “Modern Turkey.”\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{75} Lowell Thomas, Jr., interview, May 13, 2009, 22.
\textsuperscript{76} Lowell Thomas, Jr. – Biographical Sketch, Box 863, Folder 1, LTP.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} “Hull Names Oil Man to Post,” \textit{New York Times}, August 7, 1941, 12.
\textsuperscript{79} Max Weston Thornton published his book \textit{Turkey: An Economic Appraisal} (New York: Greenwood Press) in 1949; Excerpts from Thornburg letter mailed Tehran to Lowell, Jr., 13 June 1949, Box 469, Folder 2, LTP.
\textsuperscript{80} Lowell Thomas, Jr. – Biographical Sketch, Box 863, Folder 1, LTP.
returned to Iran to continue his work with Thornburg and to gather material for another
tavelogue he was planning for his burgeoning lecture business.\footnote{81}

It took a week for Lowell, Jr. to receive his father’s “miracle” telegram and he sent his
father a radio message letting him know that he and his photographer, Johnny Roberts, were
hastening to Calcutta to start making arrangements for their trek into Tibet.\footnote{82} Lowell, Jr.
received help from the US Embassy in India and his father also requested aid and advice from
various parties concerning preparations for the trip.\footnote{83} Thomas expected Lowell, Jr. to make all
the preliminary preparations, but he did not want to take any chances if his son was not able to
travel to Calcutta quickly. Timing was important due to the impending monsoon season in India
and Tibet, so during the days between July 11th, when he sent his initial telegram to his son, and
July 18th, the day Thomas departed for Calcutta and when Lowell, Jr. responded, Thomas
remained busy writing letters to his contacts in the US and Indian governments.

Thomas wrote to Charles H. Derry, the American Consul General, US-Calcutta,
requesting assistance in obtaining supplies in Calcutta and transportation to Sikkim.\footnote{84} He also
sent a letter to Ambassador Henderson that included a list of supplies that was put together by
Sudyam Cutting. In addition to requesting help procuring necessary provisions, Thomas asked
Henderson to help “engage a head man, interpreter, cook…arrange for ponies in Gangtok,
bearers in Calcutta…”\footnote{85} Sri Harish Dayal, a political officer in Sikkim,\footnote{86} and B.R. Sen, the

\footnote{81}Lowell Thomas to Charles H. Derry, 14 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP; Lowell Thomas, Jr., interview, May
13, 2009, 48.
\footnote{82}Lowell Thomas to Lowell Thomas, Jr., 18 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Thomas wrote that he was relieved
to have received his son’s radio message from Teheran. Thomas was leaving that night for Calcutta.
\footnote{83}Lowell Thomas, Jr., interview, May 13, 2009, 96.
\footnote{84}Lowell Thomas to Charles H. Derry, 14 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
\footnote{85}Lowell Thomas to Loy W. Henderson, 14 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
\footnote{86}Memorandum Charles H. Derry to Harish Dayal, 23 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Derry sent a memo to
Dayal requesting that he assist Thomas and his son by having “… in readiness all necessary animals and personnel
for journey of two gentlemen to Lhasa as soon as possible following their arrival [in] Gangtok August second.”}
Minister of India, were also contacted on Thomas’s behalf to help coordinate the arrangements for the journey into Tibet. Although the phrase would not be coined until the 1960s, Thomas was a control freak. He had asked his son to take care of preparations for their expedition in Calcutta, but he was unwilling to relinquish all control concerning how these preparations would be managed.

Lowell, Jr. reached Calcutta several days in advance of his father. During the short window of time before his father’s arrival he was able to gather the necessary supplies, which were on hand through the efforts of Charles Derry. Lowell, Jr. purchased more than 500 pounds of food at the Great Eastern grocery store, which made up eight cases that would be transported by pack animal. Each case contained enough food to feed father and son for six days. He also gathered all of the basic equipment they would need for the journey. The growing amount of equipment and supplies meant that additional help would be required during the journey to and from Lhasa. An interpreter, a cook, and several bearers, who would carry the provisions, and look after the pack animals during the journey, joined the Thomases.

Lowell, Jr. also became responsible for purchasing and packing appropriate gifts for the Dalai Lama, high dignitaries in Lhasa, and local officials they would meet along the way. Cutting’s advice proved to be time saving and in many cases, invaluable. He helped create the list of supplies and equipment the Thomases would need during their journey and provided

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87 Davidson Taylor, Vice President of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc., to B. R. Sen, Minister of India, 18 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Taylor was requesting for arrangements to be made for the Indian government to expedite the admission of the recording equipment that Thomas was bringing with him to Calcutta.

88 Cable sent by Mr. Sparks of the US State Department, no date was listed on cable [July 1949], Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.

89 Thomas, Jr., Out of This World, 22-23.

90 Lowell Thomas, Jr. and Lew Freedman, Lowell Thomas, Jr.: Flight to Adventure: Alaska and Beyond, (Portland, OR: Alaska Northwest Books, 2013), 71. The equipment included saddles and bridles (they would have to ride horses in Tibet, as motorized transportation was forbidden), army cots, sleeping bags, mosquito netting, flashlights, a portable table, two portable chairs, a canvas bath, tarpaulins, ski pants, ski boots, woolen shirts, sweaters, windbreakers, rain suits, a complete camp kitchen and a “first-rate” medical kit.
information concerning local customs in Tibet. However, he did offer one suggestion that went awry. Cutting urged the Thomases to bring Indian rupees in order to purchase goods in Lhasa and to tip local officials and other Tibetans that assisted them with their trip. Thomas converted $1,000 to rupees, half rupees, two-anna, and one-anna coins. The coins were packed into three small crates weighing sixty pounds each, which were carried by two pack animals. Once in Lhasa, Thomas discovered that rupees were out of favor and that Tibetans preferred paper money from India or their own currency.\(^9\)

Thomas obtained the audio equipment he would need to record his broadcasts on his trip out to Calcutta, and throughout his journey to Lhasa and back to the US.\(^9\) He acquired battery-powered recording equipment (a relatively new innovation at the time) from his CBS studio, and used it during the next several weeks to record his broadcasts. Lowell, Jr. brought his own camera equipment, including 35mm still and 16mm motion picture cameras.\(^9\)

Before Thomas left the US for Calcutta on July 18\(^{th}\), he had some final preparations to complete. Never one to shy away from an opportunity to create a media event, he decided to recruit several high-profile guest hosts to fill in for him and to help promote his latest adventure. His listening audience would not learn his final destination for several weeks, so having celebrity

\(^\text{91}\) Thomas, Jr., *Out of This World*, 27.
\(^\text{92}\) Davidson Taylor, Vice President of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc., to B. R. Sen, Minister of India, 18 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Taylor wrote that Thomas would be bringing a tape recording machine, a playback machine, extra audiotape, and batteries with him on his trip to India.
\(^\text{93}\) This was based on notes from a conversation John Ansley had with Lowell Thomas, Jr. in August, 2013; Lowell, Jr. had experience working with the innovative audio equipment his father was bringing out and discovered a flaw in the technology. When recording a ¼ inch audiotape from beginning to end, the tape would slacken towards the end of the recording causing the speed of the recording to slow down. Lowell, Jr. reported this problem to Henry J. Geist & Associates, the company that engineered the equipment, in hopes of receiving details describing how to deal with this technical issue. The sound engineers had only recently become aware of this defect and responded by sending him a detailed letter concerning how to address the problem. Unfortunately the letter was sent a few days after the expedition left for Lhasa, leaving Lowell, Jr. to deal with the problem on his own. See the following letter for additional information: Henry J. Geist., to Lowell Thomas, Jr. 9 August 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
substitutes offer tantalizing suggestion as to where Thomas was going heightened the sense of drama for his listeners. Thomas’s radio show was still on hiatus, but this was an opportunity his sponsors and CBS could not pass up. It was arranged that Thomas’s show would continue with guest hosts through July and until he returned. Thomas would broadcast live when possible or submit recorded broadcasts to be aired at a later date. Charles Collingwood, a prominent early television journalist, who became the chief correspondent for CBS, substituted for Thomas during the remainder of July and the first few weeks of August. Thomas did not limit his substitutes to well-known newsmen; he included a wide range of celebrated individuals. The following personalities filled in for Thomas on various days in August, September, and October of 1949: Roy Chapman Andrews, a former director of the American Museum of Natural History, who was also a well-known American explorer and naturalist; Clifton Fadiman, the American author, editor, and radio and television personality; C. Fulton Oursler, the American playwright, journalist, and editor, who wrote several popular mysteries under the pseudonym Anthony Abbot; Branch Rickey, the Major League Baseball executive, who broke the color barrier by signing the African-American hall-of-fame inductee Jackie Robinson; Gene Tunney, the former professional boxer who was the world heavyweight champion from 1926 through 1928; and Edward R. Murrow, the very popular American journalist and radio broadcaster. Thomas knew all the men who substituted for him on his radio show to varying degrees, but Murrow, a fellow pioneer in the broadcasting industry, was a good friend and neighbor.

Thomas also invited a high-profile US government official to act as a guest host on his radio news program. J. Edgar Hoover, the first director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the United States, had complimented Thomas several times for his reporting of FBI activities.

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94 Scripts [radio] – Microfiche, July – October 1949, Box 430, LTP. The radio broadcast transcripts noted who was doing the broadcasts during Thomas’s absence.
Thomas cultivated this relationship over the years and just before he left for Calcutta he contacted the FBI requesting that Hoover act as a stand-in for his show while he was abroad.\textsuperscript{95} Hoover agreed to Thomas’s request, but he never appeared as a guest host. Thomas’s good standing with high-level US government officials and conservative attitude towards communism undoubtedly saved him from the same scrutiny others received when discussing Asia’s developing relationship with the US. Apparently Thomas’s commentary on Tibet was considered to be within the acceptable political discourse under McCarthyism while the highly respected Asia scholar, Owen Lattimore, was accused of being a Russian espionage agent by Senator McCarthy. The US Department of State and FBI kept files on Thomas, but he never appeared to be targeted by either government agency.\textsuperscript{96} Thomas was a Republican, but never publicly supported a political candidate until Ronald Reagan was preparing his to make his first presidential run. He tried to take a middle-of-the-road approach when discussing politics on his newscast and he claimed that after voting for President Wilson, he did not have a chance to vote in an election again until Eisenhower ran for President because he was always traveling.\textsuperscript{97} However, he was willing to support a cause he believed in, such as the American Colony or keeping Tibet from being overrun by communist China. The fact that Thomas was clearly anti-communist on his radio program, and that this was one of the reasons why he supported Tibet, was likely the main reason why he did not draw the attention of the FBI during the Red Scare.

\textsuperscript{95} Memorandum from L. B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, 22 July 1949, Box 12, Folder 15, FCP. Clyde Tolson was the Associate Director for the FBI from 1930 to 1972. The memo stated Thomas’s planned to visit Tibet and that he was arranging for guests to guest host his news show. “Yes I agree” was handwritten at the bottom of the memo with J. Edgar Hoover’s initials.

\textsuperscript{96} The US Department of State kept a file on Thomas because of the many interactions he had with the US government. The Federal Bureau of Investigation also kept a file on Thomas for the same reason, but the FBI probed deeper into Thomas’s background in the 1970s before he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1976.

\textsuperscript{97} Mike Wallace interviews Lowell Thomas, 1970, Box 1905, Folder 06, LTP. Mike Wallace’s interview with Thomas was one of the few times Thomas actually discussed his political interests. He revealed that he was not very politically motivated while talking to Wallace.
He was careful about his politics and avoided putting himself in a position that would harm his career.

Thomas was also planning another aspect of his media blitz campaign while recruiting famous guest hosts. He broadcast from his New York studio on July 18th, the day of his departure from the US, and he ended his broadcast with a story letting his audience know that he was about to embark on another adventure and that his son would be joining him. He did not disclose the location, and would not for over a month. He told his listening audience of the suddenness of the trip and the difficulty of locating his son in Isfahan. Thomas said that Lowell, Jr. planned to make a trip through Afghanistan, which would have been the height of his adventure until he received Thomas’s telegram telling him to drop everything and travel thousands of miles from Persia. Thomas promised his listeners, “I will broadcast from stops along the way, giving news reports from one place or another. The whole series will be one of increasing strangeness, broadcasts from points more and more surprising.” He concluded his broadcast with a final teaser, “I’ll be… speaking from places along the route of the wildest and wooliest radio adventure of them all. Now - - so long until the first stop from which I can get through on the air.”

Thomas set the tone for his latest expedition with his departing broadcast and he fell into his familiar role as a travelogue lecturer. Entertainment for his listening audience was foremost in his mind when he set out for Tibet, not the political situation that was already in motion in China. On July 19th, the day after Thomas left, CBS News issued a press release to further heighten the excitement and mystery surrounding Thomas’s latest adventure. The headline read

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98 “Scripts [radio] – Microfiche,” 18 July 1949, Box 430, LTP. The last few pages of the radio broadcast transcript labeled “End” provided a lengthy teaser of Thomas latest adventure.
“LOWELL THOMAS LEAVES FOR TOUR TAKING HIM TO HIMALAYAS; WILL BROADCAST OVER CBS FROM EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA [sic].”\(^{99}\) Thomas was quoted as saying, when referring to his final destination, “The whole business of getting there is so complicated both in arrangement and travel, that I still think it wise not to say what that destination is.”\(^{100}\) The press release made it clear that Thomas’s listeners were in for exciting stories from increasingly exotic locales. Thomas was making “an extensive trip to… investigate conditions in Hawaii, Japan, China, Siam, India, and Sikkim…”\(^{101}\) Similar hints to Thomas’s final destination would continue over the coming weeks.

Thomas’s audience was promised that he would periodically broadcast directly or by recording during his regular 6:45 to 7:00 p.m. (EST) time slot throughout his latest adventure. When Thomas was unavailable to submit a broadcast, his myriad of guest hosts would fill the voids.\(^{102}\) He originally intended his trip to Calcutta to take a few days; however, once his plans for his media blitz were in place he arranged for his journey to India to take a week and a half, with several broadcasting opportunities along the way. He planned to make two broadcasts from Hawaii, before flying to Japan. Prior to leaving the US, Thomas wrote to General Douglas McArthur, who was in Tokyo, Japan, and requested to do an interview with him for his news show.\(^{103}\) MacArthur sent an enthusiastic reply, writing that he would be “delighted at the prospect of [Thomas’s] visit and is making all arrangements to facilitate [Thomas’s]

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\(^{100}\) Ibid.  
\(^{101}\) Ibid.  
\(^{102}\) Ibid. Thomas’s trip would also be an opportunity for CBS to showcase its technological capabilities. CBS made a point of highlighting the “ultra-modern, high-fidelity portable tape recording equipment” Thomas would use for recording his interviews and creating his recorded broadcasts where it was not possible for him to access a radio broadcast station. The magnetic recording tape and batteries would have to be flown in advance to the various locations Thomas would be visiting.  
\(^{103}\) Lowell Thomas to General MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, 14 July 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
The visit became a three-day event in which Thomas met the Emperor of Japan at Hayama, joined General George E. Stratemeyer, who was the commander of the Army Air Forces in the China Theater during WWII, for dinner, and finally, talked with General MacArthur for two hours. He also scheduled time to make two broadcasts to the US from Tokyo’s WVTR radio station. Thomas stopped in Hong Kong and Bangkok as he continued his progress to Calcutta, and he continued to pre-record broadcasts for his news show.

Thomas arrived in Calcutta on July 29th to discover that Lowell, Jr. and Johnny Roberts (Lowell, Jr.’s photographer) had secured a majority of the gear and supplies necessary for the trip to Lhasa. Thomas added the recording equipment he brought with him from the US to the rest of the supplies. The few days the Thomases had in Calcutta before leaving for Tibet allowed them to discuss the possible reasons they were granted permission to enter Tibet and travel to Lhasa, when friends of Tibet, such as Marco Pallis and Frank Ludlow, were denied entry. By the summer of 1949, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army had control of a vast majority of China. They openly stated that once they had complete control of China they would turn their attention to Tibet. It was clear to them that the catalyst was political, but they did not fully understand the Tibetan government’s interest in their visit. It was only when Thomas reached Calcutta that he finally admitted to himself and his son that the nature of his trip to Tibet was very serious, but

104 Letter from General Stratemeyer for General MacArthur to Lowell Thomas, [no date] phoned to CBS, San Francisco by Col. Limbley, USAF, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
105 Itinerary from General Headquarters, Far East Command, Office of the Chief of Staff, Visitors’ Bureau, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP. Thomas was also scheduled to visit the Imperial Palace Grounds and have a tour of Tokyo.
106 “Scripts [radio] – Microfiche,” 1 July 1949-31 August, 1949, Box 430, LTP. A list of broadcasts appeared after the July 18, 1949 broadcast transcript; Tibet Preliminaries, 1949, Box 158, Folder 4, FCP. Itinerary listing Thomas’s Pan American flight schedule.
107 Telegram from Dean Acheson to the American Embassy, New Delhi, India, 15 July 1949, Box 158, Folder 13, FCP. Acheson detailed Thomas’s and Lowell, Jr.’s travel plans. Thomas traveled by Pan American Airlines and arrived in Calcutta on July 29th, Lowell, Jr. arrived four or five days in advance of his father.
his listening audience was still in the dark concerning his final destination. Thomas would
downplay the political ramifications of his invitation to Lhasa throughout his journey.

The Thomases left Calcutta by train for a 300-mile trip to Siliguri located in the Indian
state of West Bengal on July 31, 1949, with Roberts, but he had only received permission to go
four miles into Tibet. They were traveling with over a ton of supplies, and camera and
recording equipment. Once they arrived in Siliguri they journeyed seventy miles by bus to
Gangtok, the capital, and the largest town of the Indian state of Sikkim, situated in the lower
Himalayas. The trip to Gangtok took two days because they had to cross two landslides that had
blocked the road. At each stop they were forced to transfer their thirty-seven boxes and pieces of
luggage to a new vehicle before being able to continue their expedition.

Upon arriving in Gangtok the Thomases were greeted by Harishwar Dayal, an Indian
political officer, who informed them that their final clearances to enter Tibet had been received.
It read, “With reference to Mr. Lowell Thomas, United States national, and his son—although
the Tibetan government does not usually allow foreign visitors to come to Lhasa—in view of
friendly relations between the Tibetan government and the government of the USA, they have
granted permission for these two to enter the country.” Thomas made his first recordings
documenting their trip while in Gangtok, using his portable battery-powered recorder. The reels
of ¼ inch audio tape were then sent back to New York City to be aired on his CBS radio news

109 Thomas, Jr., Out of This World, 41, 64-66.
110 Ibid., 41.
111 Ibid., 46.
program. Thomas’s broadcasts were the first to be made from this part of the world for a US audience.\textsuperscript{112}

The Thomases started their trip to Lhasa on August 5\textsuperscript{th}, and they anticipated that their 300-mile trek would last twenty-one days.\textsuperscript{113} It was monsoon season and the beginning of the ancient trade route they followed took them through rain-soaked bamboo forests. Their goal was to travel to one of the few towns or villages along their route each afternoon, and when necessary, hire a fresh outfit of pack animals. Within two days they had climbed to an elevation of 12,000 feet in the Himalayas. A few days later they reached an elevation of 14,800 feet at Nathu-La as they crossed the border between India and Tibet; and Thomas entered his last “forbidden” land.

Almost three decades after his first attempt to gain permission to enter Tibet, Thomas and his son were invited by the Tibetan government to visit what was still a closed and largely unknown country. To most Westerners it was considered Shangri-La (the land of eternal youth), and prior to the Thomas’s invitation, only six Americans had ever been officially allowed to enter Tibet. WWII brought dramatic change to most of the world, but Tibet was resisting attempts from the outside to disrupt its traditional way of life. Ultimately the political situation in China and the increased interest in Asia by the US government after WWII resulted in one of America’s most popular newsmen and personalities being granted entrance to Tibet. The Tibetan government’s invitation to Thomas showed its officials realized they could no longer ignore the situation in China. Thomas’s trip was highly publicized and garnered the close

\textsuperscript{113} Telegram from Dean Acheson to the American Embassy, New Delhi, India, 15 July 1949, Box 158, Folder 13, FCP. Acheson noted Thomas’s and Lowell, Jr.’s travel plans and commented that the Thomases planned to start their trek to Lhasa on August 4\textsuperscript{th} or 5\textsuperscript{th}; Thomas, Jr.,\textit{ Out of This World}, 52. Lowell, Jr. stated that they started for Lhasa on August 5, 1949.
attention of his listening audience, as well as the governments of the US, China, and Russia.
Thomas was pulled into a political situation he was not entirely prepared for at the beginning of
his journey. He would walk a tightrope trying to appease the Tibetan government and to
accommodate the White House.
CHAPTER THREE
A History of Conflict:
The Complex Relationship between China and Tibet

Any discourse on the long and complicated history between Tibet and China can pose a challenge in that it is common in Western thought to equate Tibet with Shangri-La, the utopian society described in James Hilton’s popular 1933 novel, Lost Horizon. Hilton’s story takes place in a mystical valley that is closed off from the rest of the world and is inhabited with characters that are guided by benevolent lamas who are virtually immortal. The novel was inspired by accounts of Tibet written by British explorers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but, of course, Hilton’s tale did not represent reality. Lowell Thomas was guilty of perpetuating the Tibet as Shangri-La myth to an extent that verged on extravagance during the 1950s and beyond. How he promoted Tibet in this way will be discussed in subsequent chapters, but to better understand Thomas’s 1949 trip to Tibet it is important to put it into historical context by highlighting the centuries-long interactions and conflicts between China and Tibet, the development of the Tibetan government and its interactions with foreign countries, why the Tibetan government changed its policy and became interested in receiving support from the West in the first half of the twentieth century, and how Thomas prepared himself intellectually for his journey to Tibet. Thomas’s plan for another adventure and travelogue turned into an involved and personal story for himself and his son. The Thomases became entangled in Tibet’s history and yet Thomas and Lowell, Jr. did not fully appreciate the timing of their trip or the significance of what was transpiring between China and Tibet during the summer of 1949.

The cultural and geographical ties between China and Tibet are centuries old and territorial issues between these two regions have persisted just as long. As the Tibet scholar
Melvyn Goldstein aptly stated, “The Tibet Question is about control of a territory—about who rules it, who lives there, and who decides what goes on there.” The contentious issue of the reunification of Tibetan areas in China goes beyond the scope of this history, but the historical dichotomy created by the development of a political and an ethnographic Tibet is significant to this study. Tibetans were concerned that neither a political or cultural Tibet would survive an invasion by communist China.

The year 247 BC, the customary dating of Nyatri Tsenpo’s election as the Tsenpo, or ruler, of Tibet, is typically when most histories of Tibet begin. However, it was not until early in the seventh century (AD) that the first recorded Tibetan delegation was sent to China, documenting the first interaction between the two regions. Tibet was unified under the rule of Songsten Gampo during the early seventh century and his era lasted for two centuries. During China’s Tang Dynasty (618-907), Chinese rulers had no choice but to contend with the emergence of Tibet as a powerful kingdom, and interaction between the two regions was turbulent. Through the seventh and ninth centuries, before Tibet became predominantly Buddhist, Tibet and China were continually at war.

Tibetans were eager to learn from other cultures they encountered during their military incursions. They learned, adopted, and combined elements from China’s, Nepal’s, India’s, and Persia’s societies to create their own unique culture. Lhasa, Tibet’s capital, became the cultural center for these new developments for Tibetans. During this time of change and development in Tibet, China experienced the collapse of the Tang Dynasty in 905 AD and a period of disunity from 907 to 960, known as the era of the Five Kingdoms. There is no evidence of political

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1 Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, x.
3 Snellgrove and Richardson. *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 31-49.
interaction between China and Tibet during this era or during China’s Song Dynasty (960-1279). For a period lasting more than three centuries, Tibetan and Chinese political relations were basically non-existent. It was not until the thirteenth century that Tibet and China experienced a renewal of political interaction.

Late in the twelfth century, Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol empire, captured immense territories across Eurasia and in 1207 Tibet submitted without resistance to his overwhelming force. To avoid interference in the administration of its territories and further invasions, Tibet paid tribute to Genghis Khan. The Mongols effectively ruled Tibet through the lamas for over a century. Kublai Khan (1215-1294), the founder of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), was converted to Tibetan Buddhism by the lamas of Sakya monastery near Lhasa.

The Mongol-led Yuan Dynasty conquered China in 1279 after a prolonged struggle, bringing both China and Tibet under the rule of the Mongolian Empire until the fourteenth century. However, the two regions were only united by a common enemy, not politically or economically. During the fourteenth century, Mongolia’s power began to wane and China overthrew their much resented conquerors. Although Mongol power lessened, the political structure in Tibet remained the same; secular and religious power remained under the control of the lamas. China exercised no authority over Tibet during the Ming Dynasty, but Tibetan monks did make frequent visits to China on missions of tribute. Throughout most of the Ming Dynasty there was little significant contact between China and Tibet, and the two regions developed separately over the next few centuries.

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4 Ibid., 2.
7 Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 149-155.
Modern China views its defeat of Mongolia and the start of the Ming Dynasty in 1368 as the point in time when China assumed limited authority over Tibet. Previously, China and Tibet were under the dominion of Mongolia, but once the yoke of control was broken the Chinese emperors of the Ming Dynasty claimed Tibet as their own. However, Tibetan historians have a different point of view. Mongolia gained control over Tibet many years before it conquered China. Tibet subsequently gained its independence from Mongolia during the time of Changchub Gyalsten (1302-64), the influential Tibetan who founded the Phagmodrupa Dynasty that displaced the Mongol supported Sakya regime. China gained its independence years later in 1368, and thus had no claim to Tibet.\(^8\)

Significant, but peaceful, interaction continued between Tibet and Mongolia until the latter part of the seventeenth century. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries became a turbulent time when China gained more political power over Tibet by rousting the Mongols and other invading forces out of Tibet. However, after 1750, the leader of Tibet was no longer appointed by China and the Dalai Lama was tacitly recognized as the supreme ruler.\(^9\)

The 8\(^{th}\) Dalai Lama’s era experienced warfare from different quarters. In 1769, the Gurkhas conquered Nepal and then made their first incursion into Tibet in 1788. Tibetan authorities negotiated with the Gurkhas and ultimately agreed to pay them tribute if the Gurkha army would withdraw. The Gurkhas attacked Tibet again in 1791 after tribute payments from Tibet ceased. China sent an army of 10,000 to 15,000 men to fight the Gurkha army. The

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8 Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 100.
Gurkhas were defeated and they were subsequently forced to pay tribute to the emperor of China to ensure the withdrawal of the Chinese troops from Nepal.\textsuperscript{10}

China continued to take a greater interest in Tibet and to make changes to its government in the late eighteenth century, which pushed Tibet into deeper isolation. China established absolute control over Tibet’s communications with the outside world. External correspondence sent by the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama was first approved by the ambans (Chinese officials). The Chinese government banned foreigners from visiting the region. China was particularly suspicious of the British, who had expanded their influence in the Indian subcontinent, and who the Chinese suspected of helping the Gurkhas invade Tibet. In imposing these measures, China hoped to make it more difficult for foreign countries to forge relationships with Tibet. Such alliances, China thought, would threaten China’s vital economic and military interests in Asia. The Tibetan government did not protest China’s actions, since this limited Britain’s growing influence in the region, including British-sponsored Christian missionaries settling on the Indian-Chinese border.\textsuperscript{11}

The years between 1805 and 1875 saw the 9\textsuperscript{th} through the 12\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lamas come and go. At the end of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century, Tibet had become a desirable asset to the three major world powers: Britain, Russia, and China. All three countries wanted Tibet to be in its exclusive sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{12} The British made contact with Tibet beginning in the eighteenth century, attempting to open trade routes through Tibet to China. British representatives and explorers met with little success in instituting trade or any kind of relationship with Tibetans during the late eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. During the 1880s


\textsuperscript{11} Kapstein, \textit{The Tibetans}, 161-64.

\textsuperscript{12} Grunfeld, \textit{The Making of Modern Tibet}, 48-50.
and 1890s, Russia sought to develop closer ties with Tibet. Russia was a relative newcomer to the group of countries trying to establish or expand interests in Asia. Russia, like China, believed it had a legitimate claim to Tibet based on its conquest of Mongol-held territories centuries earlier. When the 13th Dalai Lama began to favor an alliance with Russia, largely through the influence of his Russian born tutor, who represented Tibet in talks with the Russian czar, the British government became concerned that a Tibet-Russia alliance was imminent and took action.

Britain appointed Sir Francis Younghusband, an army colonel, to lead an expedition that was officially named the Tibet Frontier Commission in 1903. The Commission was intended to establish diplomatic relations with the Tibetan government. However, Tibet and China viewed the British party, which was escorted by a large military force, as an invasion and refused to engage in any form of diplomacy while the British remained on Tibetan soil. Undeterred, Younghusband and his men continued their march towards Lhasa into the spring of 1904 and were met by a series of attacks by the Tibetan army. The Tibetan soldiers, who were poorly equipped, inflicted few casualties on the professionally trained British troops. The British expedition retaliated to these attacks and in one instance effected what amounted to a massacre. Younghusband and his men slaughtered hundreds of Tibetan soldiers with their Maxim machine guns and decisively defeated the Tibetan army. In the aftermath, the British imposed a treaty on Tibet with the goal of keeping the region closed to all foreigners except those from Britain. Sir Charles Bell, the British-Indian Tibetologist, was installed as the political officer in Sikkim in 1908 and became known as “British India’s ambassador to Tibet.”

14 Alex McKay, “‘Kicking the Buddha’s Head’: India, Tibet and Footballing Colonialism,” *Soccer and Society*. 2 no.2 (2001): 91.
Lama in 1910 and became a close friend and informal advisor to him, and eventually wrote the Dalai Lama’s biography. Bell’s friendship with the Dalai Lama helped Britain establish closer ties to Tibet, but this relationship was tenuous at best. Britain waffled between maintaining a genuine political and economic connection with Tibet and simply using the region as part of a larger strategy to fortify its position and interests in Asia. Yet Britain reawakened the debate as to Tibet’s status: its future as an independent nation hung in the balance.

Immediately following the Younghusband expedition, a series of diplomatic initiatives involving Britain, Tibet, and China set the stage for another major shift in Tibet’s relationship with China. Britain signed two treaties to secure its interests in India and in Tibet. The Convention Between Great Britain and Tibet was an agreement intended to establish closer ties between Britain and Tibet, and was ratified at Simla, India, in November 1904. Tibet and Britain signed the agreement but China did not. The treaty ensured that Britain would be part of any future negotiations regarding Tibet’s relationship with China. In return for keeping foreign powers from interfering in Tibetan affairs, Tibet agreed to give up any relations with foreign states other than Britain. The Tibetans believed a closer relationship with Britain would hamper China’s ability to threaten Tibet’s independence; however Britain continued to recognize Chinese authority over Tibet. At the 1906 Anglo-Chinese Convention, China and Britain met in Beijing, where they signed an agreement that effectively reversed the most important elements of the 1904 convention. Under the Anglo-Chinese Convention, Britain agreed that all negotiations concerning Tibet would from that point on be conducted solely with the Chinese, provided that

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no other foreign powers (particularly Russia) were allowed into Tibet. The British also agreed “not to interfere in the administration of Tibet.” China regarded the 1906 treaty as a sign of weakness and disinterest by Britain and took it as an opportunity to retake control of Tibet. China fortified military outposts on its eastern border with Tibet and built transportation and phone lines into the region. Tibetans bristled at the move, but there was little they could do. By 1909, the Chinese military has secured control over the eastern part of the region.

In early 1910, for the first time in Tibet’s history, its people openly appealed for help from the outside world. The Tibetan call for aid was in response to China sending 2,000 troops to take over the entire region. Tibetan soldiers, led by the 13th Dalai Lama, fought against the Chinese take over, but Tibet’s meager armed forces were no match for the Chinese. By February, the Chinese army had reached Lhasa. The Tibetan government strenuously objected to the Chinese invasion and the Dalai Lama called for European countries to demand that the Chinese emperor withdraw his troops. Britain protested the invasion in word only, but they did nothing more to try to stop China, maintaining that China had sovereignty over Tibet. No outside help was forthcoming and the Dalai Lama fled to India shortly before the Chinese reached the Potala Palace.

The establishment of direct rule in Tibet by the Chinese Qing government in 1910 was a significant turning point in Tibet-Chinese relations. The Tibetan government was willing to

17 Charles Bell, Tibet Past and Present (Oxford: s.n. 1927), 288.
accede to Chinese control with limited interference in the internal matters of Tibet, but the
government refused to acknowledge the complete authority of the Chinese government. The
Dalai Lama established a government-in-exile in India with some of his leading ministers. The
Panchen Lama remained loyal to the Dalai Lama and refused to obey Chinese demands that he
lead a temporary administration from Lhasa. At the same time the countries that were once so
eager to establish a presence in Tibet now had other priorities. Russia was no longer an effective
player in the Great Game after an abortive internal revolution and the Russo-Japanese War in
1905, and Britain began to view its relationships with China and Russia as being of greater
importance during the same time period. Perhaps the supreme irony for Tibetans in 1910 was
that China’s Qing government established its most dominant control over Tibet on the eve of its
collapse.

The Xinhai or Chinese Revolution took place in 1911 and toppled the Qing Dynasty; a
dynasty that had ruled China for more than 200 years and brought the Chinese empire to the
height of its power. However, the inability of the Qing government to modernize China,
effectively deal with foreign aggression, eradicate internal political corruption, or pacify the
ethnic resentment against the ruling Manchu minority led to the empire’s downfall. The
Republic of China established a new republican government and replaced the emperor and his
court with a parliament and a President. The new President of China proclaimed that all former
imperial lands, including Tibet, still belonged to China. The leaders of the new Republic
apologized for the actions of the Qing government and offered to restore the 13th Dalai Lama’s
title.22 The Dalai Lama refused and declared that he was the ruler of an independent Tibet.23

22 Bradley Mayhew and Michael Kohn, Tibet (Footscray, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2005), 32.
Tibetan opposition groups successfully expelled the Chinese troops and the ambans from Tibet by the end of 1912. In 1913, the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa from his exile in India and formally declared his country’s independence and broke all ties with China. He proclaimed that the relationship between China and Tibet was not one of subordination and that Tibet was an independent nation. Upon his return, the Dalai Lama resumed his role as the spiritual and secular leader of Tibet. The Tibetan government reinforced its border areas to block possible Chinese invasions and in 1913 Tibet and Mongolia concluded a treaty on mutual recognition, which proclaimed their independence from China. Relations between Tibet and China had reached a standoff. China ignored the declarations of Tibetan independence, which the Tibetans remained equally adamant about maintaining. Tibet’s international status remained unclear. To European powers such as Britain, it seemed inevitable that Tibet would again fall under China’s control. China appeared determined to subdue Tibet and its weak military hampered Tibet’s ability to defend its independence in an increasingly aggressive and competitive world.

Britain maintained an interest in Tibet preserving its autonomy over its internal affairs. An independent Tibet would blunt any threat that Chinese rule would pose to the United Kingdom’s interests in Asia. In an effort to promote Tibetan independence, Britain organized a second Simla Convention in 1913. Simla was intended to decide Tibet’s future status through a series of negotiations between Tibet, China, and Britain. Britain suggested dividing Tibet into Outer and Inner regions. The proposed Outer Tibet made up approximately the same area as the modern Tibetan Autonomous Region and would be self-governing, but under Chinese suzerainty. The proposed Inner region would consist of eastern Kham and Amdo; Lhasa would

25 Kuzmin, Hidden Tibet, 85-86.
remain Tibet’s capital, but would only be concerned with administering religious matters.\textsuperscript{26} The Inner region would officially become part of China, but it would not become one of China’s provinces.\textsuperscript{27} Henry McMahon, the chief British negotiator, drew a new boundary between Tibet and India that became known as the McMahon Line. This boundary effectively annexed 9,000 square kilometers of southern Tibet for British controlled India. Controversy over the McMahon Line was what ultimately caused negotiations at the Simla Conference to break down before the accord was signed. China rejected the idea of the new boundary between India and Tibet, charging that Britain illegitimately transferred a significant portion of Tibet to India. McMahon and the Tibetans did sign the accord and added an annotation noting that China would not have the rights stated in the accord unless the Chinese government also signed the document.\textsuperscript{28} Britain in 1913, and India in 1947, when its government gained its independence, viewed the McMahon Line as the official boundary between India and Tibet. After the end of the Simla Convention in 1914, China claimed that the annexation of what became the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh was illegal. China had not signed the accord, rendering it and the new boundary meaningless from the point of view of the Chinese government, and China still claimed sovereignty over Tibet.\textsuperscript{29}

After the ambans were expelled from Lhasa in 1912, China no longer held an official presence in Tibet and there was limited direct communication between the two governments. Tibet began a \textit{de facto} independence from China, which lasted until 1950 when the People’s


\textsuperscript{27} Goldstein, \textit{A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951}, 75.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{29} Alastair Lamb, \textit{The McMahon Line: A Study in the Relations between India, China, and Tibet, 1904 to 1914} ([London]: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 529.
Republic of China invaded Tibet. The start of World War I, which began shortly after the Simla Convention ended, diverted Britain’s attention away from Tibet; however, not all ties were severed. The Dalai Lama offered to send Tibetan troops to support Britain’s efforts in the war, but the Tibetan soldiers were never called into action. Charles Bell was invited by the Dalai Lama to visit Lhasa during the wars years, but London did not allow Bell to go, most likely due to the secret talks being conducted between Britain and China. Eventually, Bell was granted permission by the British government to accept an invitation to Lhasa in 1920. Britain was interested in maintaining its influence in Asia and Bell’s friendship with the Dalai Lama proved an effective tool in furthering this objective.

Once Bell returned to Lhasa, he resumed his role as an unofficial advisor to the Dalai Lama. He suggested that Tibet increase its army from five to fifteen thousand men, install a telegraph line between Gyantse and Lhasa, construct a hydro-electric plant in Lhasa, create a police force, and establish a British style school in Gyantse. All of his suggestions were enacted. The most remarkable of Bell’s accomplishments was his receiving permission for a British geologist to conduct surveys throughout Tibet, which effectively allowed a foreigner to roam the region at will. Bell’s influence in Tibet was significant and reached a point at which the Dalai Lama believed that the Tibetans and British had become like one family. Meanwhile, the British government sent an official message to China in 1921 stating that Britain viewed Tibet as “an autonomous state under the suzerainty of China.”

The British government’s interest in Tibet started to wane in the mid-1920s and Tibet began showing a willingness to reconnect with China. The Dalai Lama corresponded with the President of the Republic of China and he continued to send lamas to the Buddhist temple in Beijing. However, it was not until 1930 that an official party from the Kuomintang (Chiang Kai-shek’s political party) government was sent to Tibet to attempt reconciliation. A subsequent mission went to Lhasa in 1931, during which the Dalai Lama is purported to have agreed to allow the Chinese government to reestablish an official presence in Lhasa for the first time in two decades. A renewed Chinese presence in Tibet’s capital became a reality in 1934 when the Chinese government sent a delegation to Lhasa after the death of the 13th Dalai Lama, in December of 1933. The delegation quickly began negotiations with Tibetan officials over issues of trade and border disputes, and two members of the delegation remained in Lhasa with a radio transmitter to allow China and Tibet to continue negotiations. The British government became concerned that it might lose all interests in Tibet if the Chinese government reasserted control in Lhasa, so in 1936 British officials traveled to Tibet to attempt to install a permanent British presence in Lhasa. Hugh Richardson, the British Trade Agent in Gyantse, was reluctantly allowed to remain to mediate the return of the Panchen Lama from China (where he had remained after fleeing Tibet in 1923). Richardson, like the Chinese delegation, kept a radio transmitter with him in Lhasa. A radio contact in the Asian continent would be important for Britain in the years to come. Although WWII would not start for Europe until 1939, Asia was already experiencing military conflicts. The Empire of Japan had invaded Manchuria in 1931,

and in 1937, Japan would invade the Republic of China starting the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Tibetan government officials wanted to maintain ties with the Chinese and British governments, but they had understandable concerns about the true motivations behind both governments establishing permanent offices in Lhasa.

After the death of the 13th Dalai Lama, Tibet was governed by high level secular and religious officials until the fourteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama was discovered. Tenzin Gyasto was born in 1935 in Taktser, a small village located in the western Chinese province of Qinghai, which is also the cultural Tibetan region of Amdo. He was identified by Tibetan officials as the 14th Dalai Lama at the age of two and brought “home” to Lhasa in 1937, after paying the Chinese government an exorbitant fee to take the rediscovered Dalai Lama and his temporal family out of China.40 The Dalai Lama’s Regent would rule in his name until he reached the age of eighteen and assumed his full authority. The Chinese government expected to play a role in the selection of the next Dalai Lama, but the selection was made before the Chinese could take an active part in the process.41 An official ceremony was conducted in Tibet in 1939 to recognize the new Dalai Lama, but Chinese officials claimed that the Kuomintang Government ratified the 14th Dalai Lama in 1940.42 However, there is little evidence to substantiate China’s claim.43 It is more likely that China was renewing its efforts to establish control over Tibet, while Tibet was continuing to try to maintain its sovereignty.

In 1942, Tibet created a Bureau of Foreign Affairs. The creation of the bureau was a strategy designed to formalize Tibet’s relations with foreign nations and to validate Tibet’s claim

43 Shakya, The Dragon in the Land of Snows, 6-7.
as an independent nation.\textsuperscript{44} Tibet’s new agency had its first interaction with the US concerning a military issue during WWII. Tibet remained neutral during the war, but it was located in a strategic position for the purposes of transporting supplies to China and for the creation of airfields. The US government requested that Chiang Kai-shek arrange for two OSS officers (the Office of Strategic Services was the precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency) to travel to Tibet to conduct surveys for the development of roads and airfields in 1942. China exerted no control over Tibet and the Tibetan government declined to cooperate. The US ultimately asked the British government to intervene with Lhasa to obtain permission for the OSS officers to travel to Tibet. The British were more persuasive and the Tibetan government extended an invitation to the OSS. Upon their arrival the American agents (one of whom was Ilya Tolstoy, a grandson of the Russian writer and philosopher Leo Tolstoy) presented the seven-year-old Dalai Lama with gifts and a personal letter from President Franklin D. Roosevelt requesting his assistance. The officials in Lhasa viewed this moment as a government-to-government interaction between the US and Tibet, but the United States did not hold the same opinion. The US federal government addressed the letter to the Dalai Lama as the religious leader of Tibet, not to the leader of the Tibetan government, in an effort not to offend the Chinese government. The official view of the US government was that Tibet was a territory of the Republic of China.\textsuperscript{45}

At the dawn of World War II in Europe, Tibet and China had not resolved their differences, and the war years further delayed any serious efforts to break the stalemate. To complicate matters China’s government also faced an internal threat. The Chinese communist movement, led by Mao Zedong, was gaining popularity and had become a serious menace to the Nationalists. In 1945, Tibet entreated Chiang Kai-shek to officially recognize Tibet’s autonomy,

\textsuperscript{44} Grunfeld, \textit{The Making of Modern Tibet}, 78.
\textsuperscript{45} Goldstein, \textit{The Snow Lion and the Dragon}, 37-39.
but he stated that Tibet was an outer province of China.\footnote{Fosco Maraini, \textit{Secret Tibet} (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), 114.} The Tibetan government was frustrated by the response, but at the time Chiang’s reply meant very little to most Tibetans. Tibet was a still closed country and the only foreign affairs they were concerned with involved trade relations between India and China. When Japan surrendered in 1945, Chiang Kai-shek's government had suffered from fighting the Japanese, and was ill equipped to reassert its authority in many regions of China. With help from the US it was able to reclaim the coastal cities captured during the war, but the communists, who were more motivated and disciplined, maintained control of the majority of the countryside in the north of China.

Following WWII, the United States encouraged peace talks between Chiang and communist leader Mao Zedong. Chiang and Mao were distrustful of each other and of the United States' professed neutrality, and they soon returned to all-out war. The US suspended aid to Chiang Kai-shek from 1946 to 1948. Although Chiang was recognized internationally as a world leader, his government was corrupt, inflated, and deteriorating rapidly. The war had severely weakened the Nationalists both in terms of resources and popularity, while the communists were strengthened by aid from Stalin, and guerrilla organizations extending throughout rural areas in China. The Nationalists initially had superiority in arms and men, but their lack of popularity, poor morale and apparent disorganization soon allowed the communists to gain the upper hand.

Meanwhile a new Chinese Constitution was announced in 1947, and Chiang was elected by the National Assembly to be President, but the communists refused to recognize the new Constitution or its government as legitimate. Chiang resigned as President in January, 1949, and in December of the same year communist troops laid siege to Chengdu, the last Kuomintang
occupied city in mainland China. Chiang moved his unsanctioned government to Taipei, Taiwan, where he attempted to resume his duties as President on March 1, 1950.47

When civil war erupted in China in 1946, the Tibetan government once again announced its complete independence from China to the world. Tibetan officials also decided to remove any suspected communist sympathizers from their country. A Chinese restaurant in Lhasa was closed and approximately one hundred Chinese men, women, and children were asked to leave the country. An honor guard escorted them on an eighteen-day trip to Yatung, a village close to India’s border. Throughout the journey a band played music to entertain the “departing guests,” and they were given presents of food and money.48

Tibet intended this measure to demonstrate to the world that they were an independent country and would not tolerate outside interference. This action was taken in part due to the concerns the 13th Dalia Lama shared with his advisors in a letter two years before he died. He wrote that the communists would try to destroy the Tibetan culture by corrupting it from within as well as invading from without. When Mao’s Communist Party of China learned of the expulsion of their people, the action was viewed as a revolt against communism.49

In 1947, India gained its independence from Britain. Tibet’s international political situation changed. Affairs in Asia were suddenly out of Britain’s hands, leaving the new government of India to deal with Tibet. Shortly after India became independent from the United Kingdom, the Tibetan government tried to reclaim the portion of Tibet south of the McMahon Line, but India still recognized the McMahon line as the official border.50 Tibet and India agreed

48 Thomas, Jr., *Out of This World*, 37-38. The same story was related in, Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 408.
49 Thomas, Jr., *Out of This World*, 38.
to continue relations as set forth by the British, abiding by the terms of the 1914 Simla Convention. At the same time, however, India acknowledged Chinese authority over Tibet without actually denying Tibet’s independence. Although India’s stance was no different than Britain’s, the continued ambiguity of the situation made the Tibetan government uneasy.

Tibet’s political subordination to China continued to be corroborated by the Chinese government and Western countries through the end of the 1940s. In 1947, Tibet represented itself as an independent nation when it sent a delegation to the Asian Relations Conference in India. Tibet’s flag was flown with other nations and it was represented as a separate country on the maps printed for the conference. At China’s insistence the maps were altered and the Tibetan flag was removed.51 Another incident occurred in 1948, when Tibet sent a Trade Delegation to India, the US, the United Kingdom, and China. The members of the trade mission traveled with Tibetan passports, the first official Tibetan passports to be issued for travel abroad.52 The passports were approved by officials in British controlled Hong Kong, but when the Chinese government protested this action, the British government demurred and reaffirmed that the United Kingdom did not recognize Tibet as an independent nation.53

Tibet’s trade mission had other important implications for its government. It was intended to establish direct trade between Tibet and foreign countries (instead of having India act as an intermediary on Tibet’s behalf), to purchase gold bullion to support Tibetan currency, and most significantly for this history, to raise awareness of Tibet’s political status as a sovereign nation on an international level.54 Tsepon Shakabpa, the Tibetan Minister of Finance, was appointed as the head of the trade delegation. Shakabpa was the same individual who made the

52 Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 404.
final arrangements in Lhasa for Lowell Thomas to visit Tibet in 1949. Not surprisingly, Shakabpa became aware of Thomas’s reputation during the delegations’ visit to the US. At this point in Thomas’s career he was one of America’s most popular personalities and was omnipresent in the media.

Thomas was usually well equipped when preparing to travel and he was in the early stages of formulating a travelogue production, broadcast, or a publication. He would read available background materials and, whenever possible, speak with individuals who were knowledgeable about a region, country, or person he was about to visit. Thomas’s long-time interest in Tibet began while he was in grade school, as is evidenced by the existence of his grammar school geography book in his personal library and a seventh grade geography test, on which he received a perfect score, and referred to “Thibet” as “the rooftop of the world.” Thomas’s continued interest in and failed attempts to visit Tibet fueled his personal desire for information concerning the region to the point that he was considered something of an authority on the territory well before visiting Tibet in 1949.

All evidence suggests that Thomas readied himself in a similar fashion before embarking for Tibet in the summer of 1949. He was as well versed in the region’s history and political standing in the world as an individual who was the product of a Western culture could be. He had read books concerning Tibet and had been in contact with various authorities of the region.

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55 Lowell Thomas, Education, Garfield Grade School, Box 253, Folder 4, LTP. Thomas received a perfect score on a geography test, which required him to provide answers about regions around the world. This included Tibet, which he referred to as “the rooftop of the world.” Thomas’s grade school geography book was the only textbook he kept in his personal library from this time period.

56 H. DeLong to Lowell Thomas, 20 August 1938, Box 156, Folder 9, FCP. DeLong contacted Thomas in the hopes that Thomas could tell him who ruled Tibet in 1938.
and culture for decades. However, it becomes obvious after reading Thomas’s personal papers and correspondence that he was traveling to Tibet with the mindset of a nineteenth century explorer. He was going to capture his trophies in the form of photos, film, and interviews with the Tibetan people with the goal of creating his next big story.

Tibet remained a largely closed society over the centuries, resisting change, absorbing aspects of other cultures at its own discretion, or as the need arose. Interactions with foreign countries were, for the most part, conducted through Tibet’s elite and had limited political impact until the end of the nineteenth century. As Tibet began to interact with the United Kingdom (particularly British-India) and the United States, its hopes to establish itself as an independent nation continued to be frustrated, due to the greater benefits these Western countries hoped to realize in appeasing China. The Tibetan government understood the potential advantages to an increased awareness of their people and culture in the wider world during the time of the 13th Dalai Lama. However, Tibet was slow to make serious efforts to allow the Western world more than a glimpse at what it perceived as Shangri-La until Thomas was permitted to visit. An invasion by communist China appeared imminent during the summer of 1949 and yet Thomas and his son were granted permission to visit Lhasa in July. Tibet only granted access for two of the five Americans who requested permission to enter Tibet, out of concern over how China would perceive this visit.

In the summer of 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) toppled the weakened Nationalist government and gained control of China, creating the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The communist takeover dramatically changed Tibet-Chinese relations. During the first

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57 The Lowell Thomas Papers contains correspondence from Suydam Cutting and Hugh Richardson. Additionally, Thomas’s personal library contains copies of *Tibet, Past and Present* by Sir Charles Alfred Bell (1924) and *The Land of the Lamas: Notes of a Journey through China, Mongolia, and Tibet* by William Woodville Rockhill (1891), which indicates that Thomas was reading background material concerning Tibet before his 1949 trip to the region.
half of the twentieth century, China repeatedly sought to bring Tibet into its fold, but Tibet continually resisted these efforts. While the two sides had serious disagreements over Tibet’s status, both Tibet and China ultimately seemed to believe that negotiations and diplomacy were the keys to resolving the issue. The CCP, however, quickly renounced all negotiations over Tibet’s future. Then, claiming that all lands formerly under Chinese authority were part of China, the PRC sent troops from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), launching a full-scale military assault on Tibet in October 1950.

Thomas arrived in Tibet on the eve of dramatic and violent change. Thomas’s fame, international experience as a newsman, and governmental connections entangled him in a political situation that was centuries in the making. He was drawn into the fringes of Cold War politics and upon his return to the US he made himself and his son unofficial diplomats for Tibet. Thomas’s reputation and influence with high-level US government officials allowed him to become involved in Tibet-China relations during the 1950s in a way that was not possible for Asianists who were being targeted by Senator Joseph McCarthy.\(^5\) Thomas’s original intent to go to Tibet to find the next big story to captivate his audiences transformed into a personal mission to raise the awareness of Americans to Tibet’s plight and, if possible, to bring aid to the Tibetan people.

\(^5\) Owen Lattimore, one of the most renowned Asia scholars of his time, was accused by McCarthy of being “the top Russian espionage agent in this country [the US].” See Owen Lattimore, *Ordeal by Slander* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), forward. Thomas knew Lattimore and was undoubtedly aware of the attacks against him during the Red Scare. Hugh Richardson referred to Lattimore in correspondence sent to Thomas on July 16, 1950, “It is also extremely good of Owen Lattimore to think about me when he has so much on his mind. Not that I imagine many people can take Senator McCarthy’s charges very seriously.” Thomas mentioned Lattimore in an undated letter, “I haven’t had a chance to get in touch with Owen Lattimore to find out how his Kumbum Lama is making out at John’s Hopkins.” Box 469, Folder 9, LTP.
Tibet had found a willing advocate in Lowell Thomas, an individual with the means to tell its story to a large audience, but was the timing right? The US government had emerged as a world power after WWII and began to expand its political, military, and economic influence throughout Asia. Additionally, the development of the Cold War in the late 1940s contributed significantly to America’s interest in Asian countries, while the political upheaval in China put renewed pressures on Tibet to settle its political status as an independent country. With all the political activity swirling around the US and Asia, Thomas’s plan to visit Lhasa seemingly had all the ingredients to attract the attention of both the American and Tibetan governments.

Thomas’s interactions with Tibet have received scant attention in any history, but they significantly changed how Americans viewed the region. He was an influential person in the media industry and he used his power to sway how the White House thought about Asia at an important time in the shaping of US foreign policy. This chapter will examine: how Thomas became an advocate for Tibet; the US government’s interest or lack thereof in the plans of one of America’s best known newsmen to do a story on a politically charged region in Asia that was of great interest to communist China and Russia; Thomas’s interactions with government officials while traveling in Tibet; and the cultural aspects of Tibet that Thomas and his son captured on film, audiotape, and in text just months before Tibet was invaded by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army.

As recounted earlier, Lowell Thomas crossed the border of Tibet in the summer of 1949. Undoubtedly, Thomas’s fame as a newsman and his many governmental connections in the US
and abroad provided him with the opportunity to visit Tibet during the summer of 1949. It is perhaps because of his reputation as a world traveler and media celebrity that the US government took little notice of Thomas travelling to a politically sensitive region.

Three decades earlier, Thomas had applied to the State Department for a passport, just after the US Secretary of the Interior, Franklin Lane, appointed Thomas to travel to Europe and the Middle East to gather materials for his WWI travelogues. This interaction was Thomas’s first introduction to the State Department and it was impressive. His application was accompanied by a letter of support from George Creel, the Chairman for the Committee on Public Information, and was sent to the Assistant Secretary of State, Philip Patchen. Creel wrote that Lane fully supported Thomas’s application and that with “the death of [Frank] Roberson, the break down of [Dwight] Elmendorf, and the withdrawal of Burton Holmes,” Thomas was the only man capable of completing Lane’s assignment to inspire patriotic devotion and encourage the American people to support the war.1 Thomas’s undertaking was also known to other major government departments, as it was officially approved and supported by the US Department of War and Department of the Navy.2

During the period between 1917 and 1949, Thomas’s name was brought to the attention of the authorities of the State Department at regular intervals.3 While Thomas was touring with his “Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia” travelogue show in Bombay, India in 1922 he was identified by the State Department as an “Advance Agent” in the case of a man who went

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1 Letter from George Creel, Chairman for the Committee on Public Information to Philip Patchen, the Assistant Secretary of State, 23 July 1917, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. The US State Department gathered a hefty file of materials concerning Thomas that date from 1917 to 1972. The file consisted primarily of correspondence, memorandum, and official reports.
2 Letter from Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War, War Department, 20 August 1917; Letter from Josephus Daniels, the Secretary of the Navy, Department of the Navy, 18 August 1917, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.
3 US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Correspondence, telegrams, and other materials concerning Thomas’s activities were present in the FOIA request.
missing in the area.⁴ About a year later, Thomas required special permission to gain entry into Afghanistan to gather material for his travelogue *Through Romantic India and into Forbidden Afghanistan*. A State Department official reported that during his efforts to help Thomas gain entry to Afghanistan he told Amir Amanullah Khan “if he wished his country to be known abroad, a man like Lowell Thomas could probably give it a good deal of publicity.”⁵ Thomas claimed in his book, *Beyond the Khyber Pass into Forbidden Afghanistan*, that he had vainly sought permission to visit Afghanistan for two years.⁶ In a saga that resembled an abbreviated version of Thomas’s failed attempts to gain entry to Tibet, it took persistence and help from various government officials to make his request come to fruition. Thomas’s activities during this time period also showed that the US government was content to keep tabs on him and to have him act as an unofficial government representative.

During Thomas’s work as a radio news broadcaster and world traveler, never more than a few years went by without Thomas contacting the State Department or an official from the State Department contacting him. Thomas’s news stories occasionally caused the State Department consternation, while others were of interest to department officials for foreign relations reasons.⁷ The US government was certainly aware of Thomas’s work during WWII, while he was acting

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⁴ Telegram from the Department of State, 17 March 1922, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. The telegram recorded Mrs. G.F. Kendall’s request for the State Department to help determine the whereabouts of her missing husband, George F. Kendall. Thomas was named as an “Advance Agent” in the area.

⁵ Letter from Cornelius Van H. Engert to the Secretary of State, 14 November 1925, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Engert described the scenario that allowed Thomas to gain permission to travel in Afghanistan in 1922. He noted that Thomas’s description of how he was granted permission to visit Afghanistan in his book *Beyond Khyber Pass* (The Century, 1925) was slightly misleading; however Engert believed that Thomas’s statements were made in good faith.


⁷ Telegram (the sender was not identified) sent to the Secretary of State complaining about the veracity of a news story broadcast by Thomas concerning US government activities in Cuba, 4 October 1933, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request; John F. Simmons to the Secretary of State, 10 January 1946. The source was a letter complaining about an “objectionable International News Service story by Lowell Thomas on the alleged conduct of American troops in Germany”; Claude G. Bowers to the Secretary of State, Memorandum of an interview conducted by Lowell Thomas with the President of Chile, 5 July 1943, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. The Embassy of the United States of America sent the memorandum of the interview of Thomas’s interview to the State Department because they thought it would be of interest.
as a war correspondent. In 1943, Thomas travelled to South America to interview Chilean
President Juan Antonio Rios. President Rios was under the impression that Thomas was a US
government official until Thomas explained that he had no official government connections.
Thomas clarified his statement by adding that he was a “radio broadcaster and a newsman” and
could not hold any official government position because of his profession, but due to his
prominence in American media he had a large and influential listening audience. This episode
in Thomas’s career as a war correspondent may partially explain the Tibetan government’s belief
that he was a “very important person in the American government.” To the Tibetans, Thomas
and his son embodied the US government or at least major governmental connections. Tsepon
Shakabpa, the Tibetan Minister of Finance, or possibly other Tibetan officials may have been
aware of Thomas’s work as a war correspondent and assumed that he acted as a US government
official in this capacity. Thomas would offer his own unsatisfactory explanation to this question
in a letter he wrote to Secretary of State Dean Acheson in October of 1949. He believed that
Tibetan government officials assumed he and his son were US government officials because of
the endorsements he received from Ambassador Loy Henderson, Sir Girja Bajpai, and Sudyam
Cutting. Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear why the Tibetan government put so much stock
in Thomas, unless it was due to his fame and ability to tell Tibet’s story to a significant portion
of America.

Thomas never hesitated to send the State Department requests for information or to offer
unsolicited advice from himself or others. In one instance, he requested the names and addresses

8 Ibid.
9 Thomas Laird, The Story of Tibet, 295. This statement was made by the Dalai Lama during an interview with
Laird.
10 Lowell Thomas to Dean Acheson, 25 October 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box
594, PPF 5100, Truman Library. None of the correspondence from Henderson, Bajpai, or Cutting examined for this
dissertation corroborate Thomas’s claim.
of former Ambassadors so he could invite them to a luncheon in honor of the French Ambassador in 1938. In 1939, Thomas passed along plans from a prominent American businessman suggesting how England and France could repay war debts and in turn help with the “imminent” war. The Secretary of State received a detailed letter from Thomas in 1943 suggesting that the Post War Planning Conference make its headquarters at Lake Placid, where the “facilities are unlimited; the food and accommodations excellent; and the mountain surroundings are inspiring.” Thomas’s interactions with the State Department, personally contacting officials and officials contacting him or noting his activities, remained consistent throughout his professional career. In every documented interaction between Thomas and the State Department, both parties were quick to respond to requests indicating a high level of respect on both sides.

Thomas became acquainted with various high-ranking officials in the US government starting in 1917, and the number of his governmental connections only continued to grow throughout his career – and the State Department was no exception in his efforts to develop personal relationships. He often knew officials on a first name basis and did not hesitate to send messages directly to the Secretary of State. Thomas also came to know many US government officials stationed at international posts. He interacted with Loy Henderson, one of the key

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11 Telegram from Lowell Thomas to the State Department (no specific addressee was given), 28 April 1938, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.
12 Letter from Lowell Thomas to Stephen Early, Secretary to the President, 17 August 1939, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Thomas attached a letter from Paul Draper describing his war debt repayment plan. Draper’s letter was dated 1 August 1939.
13 Letter from Lowell Thomas to the Secretary of State, 4 March 1943, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.
14 A few examples of this included Thomas’s initial interaction with the State Department during WWI, when he was recommended to go overseas by Franklin K. Lane (the Secretary of the Interior), when Thomas requested information for events he was sponsoring, and Thomas’s meeting with President Gerald Ford when they discussed the situation in the Middle East during the 1970s.
15 There are many examples of correspondence in which Thomas was directly contacting and receiving a direct response from the Secretary of State, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.
players in getting Thomas into Tibet, at least two years before Henderson became the United States Ambassador to India in 1948.\textsuperscript{16}

Considering Thomas originally contemplated his trip to Tibet as an exotic vacation he may not have considered that there was a need to clear his trip to Tibet with any official in Washington, DC. The first indication that a US government agency was officially made aware of Thomas’s plans to visit Tibet was a telegram sent by Henderson to Acheson, asking the State Department to send the Tibetan government a formal application requesting permission for Thomas and his son to travel to Tibet.\textsuperscript{17} Once the matter of appropriate permissions to visit Tibet were out of the way, the State Department apparently did not consider the matter again until late September when word reached US officials that Thomas had been injured leaving Lhasa.\textsuperscript{18}

Thomas did contact other US governmental departments before departing for Tibet, but not for official reasons. As mentioned earlier, J. Edgar Hoover was among the many high profile guest hosts Thomas invited to sit in for him on his radio news show while he was abroad. An FBI memorandum to the United States Government recorded that Thomas “called to advise that [he] was going on an extended trip that would take him into Tibet; that they [Thomas and CBS staff members] are arranging for guests to take [over] his radio program” in Thomas’s absence.\textsuperscript{19}

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\textsuperscript{16} Letter from Lowell Thomas to Loy Henderson, 4 November 1946, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Thomas thanked Henderson for his support of the American School for Boys in Baghdad.
\textsuperscript{17} Telegram from Loy Henderson to Dean Acheson, 7 July 1949, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Henderson noted the urgency of the request and that the Tibetan government would make a special exception for Thomas and his son to visit Tibet.
\textsuperscript{18} Telegram from Howard Donovan to the State Department, 23 September 1949, US Department of State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. A brief telegram was sent indicating that Thomas was injured near Gyantse and the State Department requested the embassy to “extend all facilities for assistance.”
\textsuperscript{19} “FBI Dossier for Lowell Thomas,” Memorandum from L.B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, 22 July 1949, FCP, Box 12, Folder 15. Clyde Tolson was the Associate Director for the FBI from 1930 to 1972. The memo stated that Thomas’s planned to visit Tibet and that he was arranging for guests to host his news show. “Yes I agree” was
Thomas had without a doubt been in contact with various US federal government agencies before he left for Tibet, but his reasons were only to obtain the necessary permission to travel in that part of the world and to arrange for guest hosts for his radio news program. It was only upon their return that the US government showed a serious interest in the Thomases’ experience in Tibet; there is no evidence that the US government had any significant interest in Thomas’s travel plans before he departed. This lack of concern was in keeping with Thomas’s earlier interactions with the US government.

Thomas’s plans for an unusual break from work\textsuperscript{20} transformed into an opportunity to produce another \textit{Lowell Thomas Travelogue}, and neither he nor the US government apparently considered this to be out of the ordinary for one of America’s great storytellers. Considering the political interests and investments the US was making in Asia at the time, it seems extraordinarily short-sighted of the US government not to officially request that Thomas gather material and report his findings to the government as he had done during WWI and WWII. Developments in Asia at the time would seem to have demanded it.

Radio broadcasters from the Western hemisphere played an important role in Cold War propaganda, and the governments of both the US and Soviet Union were well aware of this fact. Soviet Union officials attempted to block or prevent their citizens from listening to Western broadcasters, but there was a significant listening audience behind the Iron Curtain. On the other hand, the US government funded Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty to broadcast news to Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East in large measure to fight communism. Radio,

\textsuperscript{20} Thomas, Jr., \textit{Out of This World}, 15. Lowell, Jr. wrote that once his father received word that he would have time off from his radio show, he viewed this as an opportunity for “his first real vacation in nineteen years on the air.” Thomas confided to his wife that he was going to try to arrange a trip to Lhasa.
and the media generally, were essential tools for the US government during the Cold War.\footnote{A. Ross Johnson and Eugene R. Parta. \textit{Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A Collection of Studies and Documents} (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2010). Johnson and Parta provided a useful history concerning Cold War journalism which demonstrated the power radio had during this time period.}

Thomas understood the influence radio could have on people and in 1959 he was interviewed on Radio Free Europe as part of his efforts to get his message out concerning the conflict Tibet was experiencing with communist China.\footnote{Lowell Thomas interview on May 19, 1959, with Martin Bush for Radio Free Europe, Box 1777, Folder 12, LTP. Thomas spoke with Bush about the 1959 Tibetan Uprising and what could be done to help Tibetans. This was apparently Thomas’s only known appearance on Radio Free Europe.} Using the media as a means to distribute propaganda was a well-established war-time tool, but Thomas was not asked by his government to engage in propaganda broadcasts when it was known he was traveling to Central Asia.

After WWII, Asia suddenly became much more important to the US because of the role many Asian countries played in the war and due to the burgeoning Cold War. The period between 1945 and 1961 saw the US expand its political, military, and economic power throughout Korea, the Chinese mainland, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Southeast Asian peninsula, and India. Hundreds of thousands of American soldiers, diplomats, foreign aid workers, missionaires, technicians, professors, students, business people, and tourists could be found in Asian countries during the 1940s and 50s. The US had never before had such significant influence in Asia and the Pacific.\footnote{Klein, \textit{Cold War Orientalism}, 95.} However, the expansion of US power was not uncontested. It coincided with the most massive process of decolonization in the history of the world. Nationalists throughout Asia launched independence movements after the war that succeeded in driving out the long established colonial powers.\footnote{The Philippines gained independence from the US in 1946, India and Pakistan from Great Britain in 1947, Indonesia from the Dutch in 1949, and Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from the French in 1954.} Between 1945 and 1960, approximately forty countries with a total population of eight hundred million revolted against
colonialism and won their independence. However, Thomas’s 1949 request to travel to Tibet, a hotspot of political and military activity at the time, did little to excite the attention of the US federal government.

The Thomases left Calcutta for Siliguri on July 31, 1949, and in Gangtok they encountered the first government official representing Tibet. Harishwar Dayal, an Indian political officer, informed them that their final clearances to enter Tibet had been received. Dayal advised Thomas that “in view of friendly relations between the Tibetan government and the government of the USA” he and his son had been granted permission to “enter the country.” The language used in this meeting gave Thomas his first indication that his invitation to Lhasa had political implications. Tibet was establishing a government-to-government interaction and Tibetan government officials explicitly referred to Tibet as a country, implying that it was sovereign.

The Thomases began their trip to Tibet on August 5th, and within a few days they crossed the border between India and Tibet at the Nathu-La Pass. The Thomases experienced the extremes of the geography in the region as they passed through a rainforest that received an annual rainfall of approximately 250 inches and their caravan continued on towards a barren plateau that received only twelve inches of rain a year. The Thomases began their journey riding mules and continued to ride mules or horses, or walk, for the duration of their time in Tibet. Tibetan tradition generally forbade travel by motorized vehicle and the Thomases, in their radio broadcasts, noted this and the fact that not even wheels were used to ease one’s burdens in Tibet. The first account of an automobile in the region dates to 1906, when a British army

25 McMahon, Colonialism and Cold War, 11.
26 Thomas, Jr., Out of This World, 41.
officer, Lieutenant Fredrick Travers O’Connor, transported a disassembled Peugeot to Phari Dzong (near the Chumbi Valley). He reassembled the car for his personal use, but the 13,000 foot altitude wreaked havoc with the carburetor causing the car to stall frequently and O’Connor would often be seen in his car being towed home by four horses.\(^{28}\) Cars were such a rarity in Tibet that one of the few in the area was given to the 13\(^{th}\) Dalai Lama by Charles Bell in the mid-1920s.\(^ {29}\) For a Tibetan to see a car would have been very unusual, to say nothing of traveling in one. For all practical purposes, Tibetans and visitors traveled by mule, horse, foot, or by boat.\(^ {30}\) Tibet did not see its first major road until 1954, when the Qinghai-Tibet Highway was opened to traffic.\(^ {31}\) The traditional mode of travel to Lhasa allowed Thomas and his son ample time to document the many aspects of Tibetan culture they encountered on their journey, but Thomas occasionally seemed unnerved by his mule’s inclination to find a path near the edge of a precipice.\(^ {32}\)

After traveling only a few miles into Tibet, Johnny Roberts, the cameraman Thomas had hoped to bring with them, had to turn back for India. With Roberts out of the scenario, it was fortunate for Thomas that his son was a talented cinematographer, photographer, and technician in his own right. It would have made Thomas’s efforts to gather material for his travelogue a tremendous challenge without the aid of a professional to help him. Roberts became responsible

\(^{28}\) Baljit Singh, “First Wheels in Tibet,” *Indian Defense Review (IDR)*, June 12, 2014, accessed February 17, 2015, http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/first-wheels-in-tibet/. Lieutenant Fredrick Travers O’Connor, a British Army officer, assembled the first car at Phari Dzong near the Chumbi Valley on November 14, 1906 and drove north a 180 kilometers to his residence at Gyantse, on the gravel track to Lhasa. O’Connor was part of the Tibet Frontier Commission that was intended to establish diplomatic relations with the Tibetan government in 1903. O’Connor became enamored with the region and stayed on to learn the Nepalese and Tibetan dialects, and to explore.


\(^{30}\) Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 9-10.


\(^{32}\) Tibet Broadcasts, Handwritten Drafts – Changu, Sikkim, 7 August 1949, Box 464, Folder 2, LTP. Thomas commented on his mule’s proclivity for finding a path near the edge of a thousand-foot drop.
for transporting the first audio recordings that Thomas and Lowell, Jr. had been making every
evening to be broadcast from the CBS radio studios in New York City.

The day-to-day filmic and photographic documentation of their journey fell largely to
Lowell, Jr. However, he and his father took turns writing up the radio broadcasts, and Lowell
Thomas, Sr. took the lead in reporting the events of their trip. Ironically, Lowell, Jr.’s Tibet
journal provides the fullest account of their journey. For this reason, his journal is an invaluable
primary source. Used in combination with the Thomases’ radio broadcasts, and Lowell, Jr.’s
book Out of This World, we can get a relatively full account of their journey to Lhasa. Many of
the unique aspects of their journey were incorporated into their broadcasts, articles, books,
lectures, and films, but some aspects of Tibetan culture noted by Lowell, Jr. were rarely
discussed on air. They were the last two Westerners to document Tibetan culture before it was
 overrun by China in 1950 and they used this to their benefit in their productions. They were
presenting first-hand experiences of a barely known land to their US audiences but, as we will
learn, the American public viewed their travelogues as little more than entertainment.

The trip from Gangtok to Lhasa was physically demanding on the Thomases. Thomas
arrived in Calcutta with a head cold which lasted until the start of their journey. They rode
mules or ponies, or walked throughout the 300 mile journey, reaching altitudes of over 16,000
feet. The high altitude often made it difficult for them to sleep and they found the many days
they traveled twenty-eight miles to be very taxing. Thomas and Lowell, Jr. were both
experienced riders, but found the “little ponies [to] have a stiff fast trot that is impossible to post
to. The shaking up that one can get in nine hours of steady jogging is really something!”33 They

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33 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September, 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP. Lowell, Jr.’s
comments on the physically demanding aspects of the journey was a rare glimpse at this aspect of their Tibet
often felt too tired and sore to walk, and had to endure a daily soaking from rain. Lowell, Jr. suffered a bout of malaria while they were in Gyantse, which slowed their progress by three days. He was fortunate that two of only a handful of physicians in Tibet were in residence and that they were able to prescribe him quinine.

Their progress was often slowed by mudslides, overflowing streams that undermined their trail and the earthen bridges they frequently crossed, and rocky moraines. In one instance they were forced to pick their way across a series of rapids and wade through water for several hundred yards. As the Thomases approached Saugang they passed through a treacherous gorge named the “bad place” and observed a line of prayer flags and a large Buddha painted on the rocks which were intended to appease the “demons of the floods.” A few miles later they passed through a holy place that consisted of “weird rock shapes” formed by water erosion, upon which were piled small quartz stones to indicate the prayers of passing travelers. The regular water crossings caused the Thomases a great deal of worry; if the two donkeys carrying their film and audio equipment stumbled and fell into the water Thomas and Lowell, Jr. “might as well turn around and go home.”

Throughout the trip the Thomases encountered many objects that were unique to Tibetan culture and religion. Prayer flags attached to tall poles appeared frequently and chortens, stone shrines, were found near every town or village. It was believed that every time a prayer flag fluttered in a breeze, its prayer was sent off to Buddha. Located near the prayer flags they noted

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34 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., 16 August 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.
35 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September, 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.
piles of small stones thrown by travelers in a gesture to scare away evil spirits. Prayer walls, or *mani*, were also numerous, and often extended a quarter mile or more. Approximately half-way to Lhasa, the Thomases and their caravan climbed up to altitudes approaching 15,000 feet, and they continued to document their trip by photographing their surroundings during the day and recording their progress each evening. As they passed a field they noted that the farmers were plowing it in a zigzag pattern. Their interpreter explained that this was done in order to drive any demons out of the field and ensure a good crop.

They made note of the flora and fauna they observed on their journey, which included birds, monkeys, grazing yaks, a wide assortment of orchids, enormous rhododendrons, monkshood, and countless other flowers they did not recognize. However, the most significant encounters they made, at least from the point of view of gathering material for a *Lowell Thomas Travelogue*, were the range of people they met in Tibet. For Thomas, a successful travelogue was about the people and the locale, and the more exotic the culture the better.

On the way to the village of Yatung they encountered a Chinese trader who was one of the suspected Communists who were being asked to leave the region by the Tibetan government. Approximately sixty of these fugitives were in the village, making their way to China. Thomas often took the opportunity to note communist activity in Tibet and the fact that the Tibetans were anxious to rid their country of this threat to their traditional way of life. Upon reaching Yatung they stayed with Rai Bahadur Sonam, an Indian trade agent. The Thomases and Sonam

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36 Ibid. Lowell, Jr. included many notes concerning what he and his father experienced on their journey into Tibet, which formed the core of what would become his book, *Out of This World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet*.
37 Ibid.
38 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September, 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP. Lowell, Jr. commented that one Chinese man they met greeted them in English and asked the Thomases where they were going. The man was evasive about what he was doing in Tibet and Lowell, Jr. suspected he was one of the communist Chinese that were being asked to leave Tibet.
exchanged gifts as a gesture of respect. The Thomases received eggs, a shoulder of yak, and yak butter, and Thomas presented Sonam with a gold-plated mechanical pencil.

Their encounter with Sonam was the first time that the Thomases noted the Tibetan custom of making a hissing noise by sucking in air through his or her teeth and sticking out their tongues to indicate an appreciation for something. Lowell, Jr. commented that this custom was generally considered good manners and was just one of many unique Tibetan habits they would mention on their broadcasts. During conversations with Sonam, he explained that Tibet and its people had no desire to change. They believed that foreigners have little to offer and long term contact would only lead to corruption from outside influences. Tibetans wanted no part in what they viewed as the “madness” of the outside world, and what Westerners called progress. They wanted their country to remain isolated, so they could continue to follow their religion, which they believed would eventually free them from the cycle of reincarnation and deliver them to the highest level of spiritual attainment, Nirvana. Sonam implied that he hoped the US would help Tibet maintain its independence and secluded religious life.39

Sonam introduced the Thomases to the Tromo Trochi, the Tibetan official who was to endorse their American passports. They again engaged in the traditional greeting of the country by trading gifts and they accepted the Tromo Trochi’s invitation to share yak-butter tea. The Thomases often worried that the gifts they gave were inadequate, but they did their best to follow this Tibetan tradition. As the Tromo Trochi endorsed the Thomases passports he stamped them with the seal of the Lhasa government and inscribed them with Tibetan characters, which he told them was the first time this had been done to any passport.40 Their passports were endorsed in

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39 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.
40 Ibid. The Thomases were honored to be the first to have their passports endorsed in this way.
this way to honor the two men, and the inscription read: “Mr. Lowell Thomas, American citizen, has been permitted to visit Lhasa by the Tibetan government. Sealed by the Tromo Trochi of Dhomu; dated the seventeenth day of the Tibetan sixth month of the Earth Bull year.”

New transportation was arranged for in Yatung. Sixteen pack animals were hired to carry the boxes of supplies and luggage, and six of the eight bearers were no longer needed. Six riding mules would carry Thomas and Lowell, Jr., their military escort, their interpreter, cook, and head bearer. Before their caravan could continue to Lhasa, they needed to meet with the Tromo Trochi a final time to receive their lamyik (a Tibetan passport, also referred to as “the Dalai Lama’s passport”). The passport was a document that measured two feet by three feet and as translated by their interpreter read:

From Dhomo [Yatung] right up to Lhasa, let it be known to all dzongs [officials] and to all others that a message has been received from the Tibetan Government that two Americans, with an interpreter and servants, have permission to proceed to Lhasa. And that sixteen pack mules and six riding animals be given to them, and coolies if required. Accounts for transport are to be settled by their armed escort, Chogpon Nima Gyabu, at the local rate. On the route, preparation for lodging, servants for the kitchen, skin boats to cross rivers and any other requirements such as milk, eggs and vegetables are to be given to them at the current rate. The wishes of the two Americans are to be fulfilled at a moment’s notice. For this journey let them be given anything without fail, as Americans are very good friends of Tibet. If they wish to proceed forthwith after arrival at each stage of the journey, let their wishes be gratified.”

When the Thomases heard the language of the lamyik, which gave them the ability to travel freely in a closed country and referred to Americans as good friends to Tibet, it must have confirmed in their minds that their invitation to Tibet was politically motivated.

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41 Thomas, Jr., Out of This World, 78.
42 Ibid., 80.
The Thomases encountered a wide variety of Tibetans on their journey, including farmers, traders, monks, mail carriers, and government officials. On their way to Gyantse, they were passed by a small group of soldiers escorting a rich landowner, his family, and several lamas. The soldiers all wore big silver belts, broad-brimmed hats, and had rifles slung across their backs. The lamas wore their traditional red robes with red and orange hats. All the people they encountered appeared to have a polite interest in the Americans and usually did not hesitate to speak with them through an interpreter. During their brief stay in Gyantse, they met the Rimshi, a high-ranking Tibetan monk, who brought Thomas good wishes from the Tibetan government. Thomas also met with the newly appointed headman of Phari, who was traveling from Lhasa to Phari to assume his new post. During their rest stop in Gopohi, Thomas and Lowell, Jr. stayed in their first Tibetan home. They were welcomed cordially by the husband and wife, and their children. The Thomases noted the everyday domestic activities going on around them: the eldest daughter of the family carried in baskets of greens and containers of milk, while the tending of the manure fires in the kitchen was carried out by a little boy running a bellows.

The journey to Lhasa was a mixture of the surreal and the soberingly real for the Thomases. They were thrown into a culture that was truly exotic to them and they saw the beauty they would later highlight in their travelogues, but they also saw the primitive living conditions and poverty that a majority of Tibetans experienced. Lowell, Jr., an experienced world traveler in his own right, frequently commented on the squalid conditions of the homes in which they stayed and the various villages they passed through. Throughout their journey, the

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43 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP. Red hats were worn by Tibetan Buddhists in the non-Gelug sects: Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya.
44 Ibid.
Thomases noted the contrast between the beauty and the filth that surrounded them, and they commented privately that Westerners would find many Tibetan towns and people to be foul. 45 The monks looked dirty and wore greasy red robes. Refuse and human waste were common sights in the streets, as were dogs and ravens scavenging amongst the waste. Being woken at night by the clamor from packs of dogs roaming the streets was not an uncommon occurrence for the Thomases and they were often accosted by a strong odor of “sewage and rotting flesh” in the towns they visited, including Lhasa. 46 References to the negative aspects of their journey would be mentioned only in passing during their broadcasts or travelogues.

On August 26th, when the Thomases were just a few days away from reaching Lhasa, the fresh pack animals they had requested did not arrive for their 5:30 a.m. start. After many assurances from the headman of Jangmch, a small village near the Brahmaputra River, they eventually discovered the animals were stranded by a flooded river. The Thomases’ crew went to the headman’s house to demand that he “make good on the transportation somehow as the government in Lhasa was awaiting” the Thomases. 47 The Thomases received yet another intimation of what to expect upon arriving in Lhasa.

The final mountain pass the caravan had to negotiate before arriving at Lhasa reached 16,200 feet and then they descended 4,000 feet to the Brahmaputra River for the last leg of their journey to Tibet’s capital. The boxes and luggage were loaded into coracles (yak skin boats) and they traveled sixteen miles downriver. A train of donkeys were waiting to take them the remaining forty miles to their final destination. After twenty-three days of riding ponies, mules, 

45 Ibid. Lowell, Jr. made many more observations concerning the squalid living conditions in Tibet than his father, but these rarely were raised in Lowell, Jr.’s book or broadcasts. He tended to follow his father’s lead when creating a travelogue and primarily commented on the positive aspects of their journey.
46 Ibid. The Thomases wondered at the lack of health issues caused by the poor sanitary conditions and attributed it to the strong sunshine and mountain air.
47 Ibid.
and donkeys the Thomases arrived in Lhasa. While there they visited many points of interest including nearby monasteries, Norbulingka, the summer residence of the Dalai Lama, and the local bazaar. The Thomases continued to document their experiences with a relatively modest array of media equipment. They made the first network radio broadcast recording in Lhasa during the first evening of their visit and as they had done previously, these recordings were rushed by courier to India, and from there they were sent by air to the CBS studios to be broadcast on Thomas’s nightly news program.

Upon entering the city the Thomases were reminded that the Tibetans were apparently treating their visit as a diplomatic occasion. A long-held custom in Tibet required visitors to pay their respects to the Dalai Lama before seeing any other individuals of importance. It was also the custom that at least three days must pass before visitors may enter the presence of the Dalai Lama. The Thomases were met by Tibetan officials and their families, who escorted them to observe the final two days of the Summer Festival held in the Dalai Lama’s summer palace Norbulingka.

During their first day in Lhasa the Thomases learned that their invitation to Tibet, as they now suspected, was politically motivated. After all of the hints they had received along the way it could not have been a surprise to either of them, but the Tibetan government waited until they had arrived in Lhasa before beginning serious discussions with Thomas. He and his son had their midday meal with the lamas and government officials who were attending the festival.

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48 Their equipment included which included a 16mm motion picture camera to capture silent color film, a 35mm camera to capture color slides, a Graflex camera to capture black and white images, and a battery powered ¼” reel to reel tape recorder to capture audio. Examples of original 16mm film, color slides, and black and white negatives from the Thomases 1949 Tibet trip can be found in the Lowell Thomas Papers. Images Lowell Thomas, Jr. captured in Tibet can be viewed at the following URLs: http://library.marist.edu/archives/LTP/Graphic%20Materials/PhotographicPrints2.1.3/tibet2.1.3.5.xml or http://library.marist.edu/archives/LTP/Graphic%20Materials/Transparencies2.1.5/35mmSlides2.1.5.1.xml.

49 Ibid. The Thomases stayed in Norbulingka while in Tibet, but they were also able to visit the Potala Palace while they were in Lhasa.
During the luncheon they met Tsepon Shakabpa, Tibet’s Minister of Finance. Shakabpa revealed that his visit to the US to encourage trade relations had a significant impact on him. He became convinced that American citizens would be sympathetic to Tibet’s cause, and he managed to convince the high officials in Lhasa that Tibet must be brought before the American public and become better known to the world if it was going to win outside support and have any hope of winning its fight against Communism and being overwhelmed by China.50

Arrangements were made for the Thomases to have an audience with the fourteen year old Dalai Lama three days after their arrival in Lhasa and they had a great appreciation for the fact that the Dalai Lama was the spiritual and temporal leader of his people, and that his followers considered him a god-king.51 On September 1st, the day Thomas and Lowell, Jr. were to meet His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, their day started at 7:00 a.m. They prepared the gifts they had purchased in India for the occasion: a tiger’s skull inlaid with gold and silver, a Swiss alarm clock, and raincoat that could be packed in a small pouch. They also planned to send the Dalai Lama photo enlargements of the images they shot during their visit. They also had a smaller tiger skull for the Regent. The Thomases arrived at Norbulingka at 8:30 a.m. on a clear warm morning and walked down the flower and tree lined avenue to a courtyard just outside of the Dalai Lama’s throne room. They took seats on cushions under an open roof and were served tea and crackers. Two high lamas reviewed the procedures they needed to follow when going before the Dalai Lama and his Regent. Approximately one hundred monks were seated to the Thomases’ left, facing the throne room. They were curious about the Americans and stared at

50 Ibid.
51 Broadcasts, Handwritten Drafts, Box 464, Folder 10, LTP. Thomas’s handwritten drafts were used to record his radio broadcasts while he was in Tibet. He later had them typed and bound.
them, and must have wondered about their strange clothing, sun-burnt faces, and fair complexions.  

On the roof above the monks, two more monks blew three foot horns of brass and bone, called *dungchen*{\textsuperscript{s}}, creating an unmusical and eerie noise. This went on for several minutes before two more seven to eight foot long horns joined in and then displaced the smaller instruments with a “thundering tone.” Across the courtyard a monk climbed a ladder to strike a golden gong to indicate the commencement of the reception. A long line of monks formed at the doorway to the throne room to receive the Dalai Lama’s blessing. They were followed by the Thomases, seven lamas and advisors, and the entire crew of servants that helped the Thomases on their journey to Lhasa. Behind the Thomases’ party there was a group of lay people. The Dalai Lama was bare-headed and seated on a throne of cushions. He unfolded a scarf upon which were placed various religious offerings: a symbol of the world, of the spirit, and of the mind. The scarf was removed by a monk and Thomas stepped forward with a scarf across his hands. Thomas bowed before the young Dalai Lama to receive his blessing, which was completed once the Dalai Lama touched Thomas’s head with his fingers. Lowell, Jr. stepped forward, and forgetting protocol, tried to offer his scarf directly to the Dalai Lama. A monk intervened and accepted the scarf and Lowell, Jr. received his blessing. The Dalai Lama presented the Thomases with red scarves as a symbol of his royal blessing and honor. The same symbolic gestures were made when the Thomases each gave a second scarf to the Regent who was to the left of the Dalai Lama. The Thomases then took seats on cushions in the throne room, while the Dalai Lama glanced at them curiously. Lowell, Jr. imagined that he saw them as

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52 *Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.* Lowell, Jr. frequently commented on the curious stares he and his father received from Tibetans.
53 *Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.* Thomas received a *dungchen*, or Tibetan horn, as a gift while he was in Tibet.
54 The ceremonial scarves are known to Tibetans as *Khata.*
symbols of “the most powerful nation in the world” and he wondered if skyscrapers, airplanes, automobiles, trains, and modern homes “flashed through his mind” when he looked at them. He thought the Dalai Lama “was a bit awed by our presence and what nation we represent[ed].”\textsuperscript{55} Lowell, Jr. was obviously warming to the idea of what help from the US could mean to Tibet.

The Thomases could hear the rumble of the dungchen outside and the room was filled with the aroma of pine scented incense. Above the throne they could see various small figures of Buddha and on either side of the Dalai Lama sat six high lamas. Many other monks were stationed around the perimeter of the room and several “giant monks,” the Dalai Lama’s bodyguard patrolled the room.\textsuperscript{56} The Thomases observed the remainder of the ceremony and noted that the Dalai Lama blessed the “common folk” using a short rod with a tassel on one end and not his hand. Thomas and his son were brought a bowl of rice and a cup of tea. In a ceremonial gesture they tossed a few grains of rice to the right, with their right hand, and then ate a pinch of rice and took one sip of tea. They received a dozen loaves of barley bread, which their servants wrapped and took home.

A high lama was called before the Dalai Lama. The lama knelt before the throne while he poured tea into a wooden bowl. He then drank the tea, bowed before the Dalai Lama three times, and resumed his seat. This was part of an ancient ritual to show there was no poison in the tea before the Dalai Lama drank his offering. Once this part of the ceremony was completed, one of the bodyguards ordered the guests to depart and the Thomases returned to the courtyard. Their camera equipment was brought to them and they were led through the palace grounds to a

\textsuperscript{55} Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP. Lowell, Jr. imagined that the Dalai Lama saw them as symbols of the most powerful nation in the world.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. Thomas commented that the Dalai Lama’s bodyguards were about seven feet tall and the photographs Lowell, Jr. took appear to support this description. The Tibetan bodyguards are called dob-dobs. Melvyn C. Goldstein wrote a study of dob-dobs in “A Study of the LDAB LDOB,” Central Asiatic Journal 1x, no. 2 (1964).
bridge, which brought them to the Lhundup Gyatsel, a golden roofed building set in the middle
of a flower covered pond. An outdoor throne, surrounded by flowers and shrubs, had been set up
for the Dalai Lama at the top of a short flight of stairs. This was the setting of the first photo
session the Thomases would have with the Dalai Lama, his Regent, Lord Chamberlain, and the
royal secretaries.

Before beginning the filming session, the Thomases met privately with the Regent,
Taktra. At the time of their visit the Regent ruled in Tibet and would do so until the Dalai Lama
turned eighteen. Their conversation with Taktra was conducted through a translator, during
which he explained that they were breaking with long established precedents and would allow
the Thomases to take color photographs and to film the Dalai Lama.57 Lowell, Jr. captured the
first color motion picture film ever taken of the Dalia Lama and the last images to be taken in
Tibet before it was overrun by China.

The Regent asked the Thomases about their journey and if they were enjoying their stay
in Lhasa. The Thomases thanked him for the Tibetan government’s many considerations and
Thomas invited the Regent to visit him in the US. They talked of furthering Tibetan-US
relations and the Thomases spoke of how Americans were interested in helping freedom-loving
peoples keep their independence. Thomas also suggested the idea of having Tibetan youths
come to the US for university study. The Regent nodded his approval of the idea. Thomas then
explained how he and his son planned to photograph and film the Dalai Lama and to share their
experiences with millions of Americans, so “America would get to know Tibet better by seeing

57 Out of This World [Book], Book Excerpt, Box 470 Folder 5, LTP.
our films.”58 The Regent must have been encouraged by the Thomases’ discussion of freedom-loving Americans.

The Regent suggested that the Thomases film the Dalai Lama in his courtyard and on his throne, so they returned to the Lhundup Gyatsel to set up their camera equipment and take light meter readings. Once they were completely prepared, the Dalai Lama “came out smiling shyly.”59 No word was spoken between the Dalai Lama and the Thomases during their official audience with him, but during the photo shoot the Dalai Lama would respond Law-les (Yes) to their requests for him to occasionally change position while he was being filmed.60 His attendants arranged his robes after he was seated on his throne and the Regent sat next to him. They took photos from all angles and five minutes later they were done. The Dalai Lama was very cooperative, smiling when asked and adjusting his position according to the Thomases’ needs. They returned to the throne room where they continued to take photos of the Dalai Lama wearing a yellow peaked cloth hat, a symbol of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. After approximately thirty minutes they had finished taking photos and motion picture film of him. The Thomases were impressed with the Dalai Lama as an individual, “He seemed human, kind, and gentle—mannered; not just a doll.”61 They understood why the people of Tibet, high and low, loved and feared the reincarnation of the “God of Mercy.”62 Lowell, Jr. concluded their session by photographing people and objects throughout the palace. He took pictures of the throne, the giant bodyguards, statues of Buddha, and workers applying gold leaf to pillars and exterior palace furnishings.

58 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.
59 Ibid.
60 Out of This World [Book], Book Excerpt, Box 470, Folder 5, LTP.
61 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.
62 Ibid.
The Thomases felt drained by the experience of meeting and filming the Dalai Lama, but they continued with their hectic schedule in Lhasa. They returned to the Summer Festival to film and record the dancing and chants. They became as much a spectacle to the audience watching the performance as the actors themselves when Thomas and Lowell, Jr. were escorted across the stage. The audience of a few thousand people laughed and clapped at their unexpected appearance and the players halted their performance and seemed equally intrigued by their American guests. That evening, the Thomases discovered that the battery on their audio recorder had unexpectedly failed, with the disappointing result that they did not capture any audio during the festival. They would discover another disappointment in their efforts to document their expedition when they returned to the US and had the many color 35mm slides Lowell, Jr. shot developed. The images were slightly out of focus due to his camera being dropped while traveling to Lhasa.

The Thomases continued filming throughout their stay in Lhasa and photographed many high-ranking Tibetans, lamas, and officials. During an opportunity to spend time with the Dalai Lama’s temporal family the Thomases met his mother, one of his brothers, his sister, a niece, and a nephew. They had tea with the family before asking them to climb to the roof of their house to pose for photographs with the Potala Palace in the background. They made such an impression on the Dalai Lama’s brother that he insisted they have lunch with him. This encounter was another important moment for the Thomases in making significant connections with high-level Tibetan leaders. Thubten Jigme Norbu was the Dalai Lama’s eldest brother. He would become almost as important as a symbol for the International Tibet Independence Movement as the Dalai Lama.

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63 Ibid. Thomas commented that the Tibetans in the audience would be disappointed when his son was no longer on stage with the performers trying to record their performance.
The Thomases were introduced to an eleven-year-old boy, who was a candidate to be the next Panchen Lama, and they took the opportunity to photograph him as well. They spent a morning in the local bazaar and photographed street scenes, the crowds, and the open air vendors. They were surprised by the range of Western items for sale, including: cigarettes, sunglasses, and flashlights. All of these products were imported from India or China on the back of a donkey or other pack animals. Not surprisingly, the tradition of not using a cart or other wheeled vehicle drove the price of these modern conveniences quite high.64 They also visited Buddhist temples and observed monks chanting, performing religious rituals, and visitors spinning prayer wheels to send their messages to the Gods.

A significant portion of the eleven days Thomas and his son spent in Lhasa were devoted to conversations with various government officials (monks and laymen). Their sponsor, Tsepon Shakabpa, had many conversations with them and proved to be well versed on world events. Shakabpa was also concerned about Tibet-US trade relations. He explained that the Tibetan economy was dependent on exports and their annual trade with the US was approximately $3,000,000.65 Tibetan materials exported to the US at the time included wool, musk, Yak tails, and furs. In 1949, all business with the US was negotiated through India, and the Tibetan government wanted to trade directly in order to be paid in US currency rather than Indian rupees. The Minister of Finance wanted to send another trade mission to the US to further develop trade relations. Thomas tried to convince Shakabpa that if he did return to the US, his delegation should wear traditional Tibetan dress, “which would greatly increase their publicity and

64 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.
65 Out of This World [Book], Book Excerpt, Box 470, Folder 5, LTP.
success.” Thomas would ultimately meet with Shakabpa on multiple occasions to discuss Tibet’s concerns over their situation with China. Over the course of these conversations Thomas requested an English translation of the Tibetan constitution and offered to send Shakabpa similar US documents and international laws books. Thomas apparently wanted to become more familiar with the internal machinations of the Tibetan government in order to offer suggestions as to the best way to improve relations between the US and Tibet. At this point in his conversations with Tibetan officials he must have decided he would use his influence in America to help Tibet if he could.

The Thomases’ talks with government representatives gave Lowell, Sr. a good idea of their current thinking and what they expected of him. Thomas was not shy about speaking his mind and making suggestions of his own to improve US-Tibetan relations and his confident responses may have furthered the notion that he was an influential US government official. Thomas met with the Tibetan Foreign Minister, Surkan Dzasa, who explained to Thomas that Tibet had been an independent nation since 1911 in spite of the fact that China claimed Tibet as an outer province. Dzasa hoped the stories that he had heard about Americans holding freedom to be one of man’s most important possessions was true. Thomas noted the almost desperate quality to his request for help from the US if Tibet was threatened by communist China or Russia and responded that he thought the US would help, but that any aid would depend largely on public opinion which would be needed to sway the Senate and House of Representatives.

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66 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP. Shakabpa apparently did not respond to this suggestion; Lowell, Jr. tended to note if a recommendation was met positively or negatively.
67 Ibid. Shakabpa later informed Thomas that he would not need the international law books, as he had recently received some by mail.
68 Ibid.
Thomas suggested three ways to improve relations between Tibet and the US. First, Tibet should encourage Hugh Richardson to present lectures about his experiences with the Tibetan people in the US. Furthermore, a “young English-speaking Tibetan should be sent to the US as an informal representative—perhaps to do a certain amount of lecturing at universities and elsewhere.” Finally, three or four promising Tibetans should be sent to American universities across the country. Dzasa agreed that these steps would be useful in promoting a greater understanding between the US and Tibet, but sending students or a representative would be up to the discretion of the Regent and the Kashag cabinet ministers. Thomas’s acumen in understanding how to influence the American public was extraordinary. Time, however, was against him.

While in Lhasa, Thomas did meet with three members of the Kashag, the governing council of Tibet, which was established during the Qing Dynasty and lasted until the Republic of China was overthrown. The senior officer, Rampa Sawang Lama, the son of the Foreign Minister, Surkhang Sawang Chempo, and Ragahar Sawang began their conversation with generalities and pleasantries. They were interested to know if the US was a religious country. Thomas assured them that Americans were more religious than was portrayed in the general media and that fifty million Americans were regular church goers. The conversation turned to what Thomas would be able to do to promote Tibet to Americans. Thomas explained how his radio listening audience would hear his stories about his experiences in Tibet and that they would see his films. He asked “would they like to see our finished movie on Tibet, and if so how about

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69 Ibid. Thomas eventually did bring some Tibetan students over to the US to attend American universities, including a young woman who went to medical school. More will be said about how Thomas helped Tibetans in later chapters.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
my bringing it back next year, putting on a full show for the Gov’t. and the Dalai Lama?” Thomas suggested that this could be the beginning of official relations between the US and Tibet. He also tried to impress upon them that a return visit would allow him to bring messages from the State Department and possibly even from the President of the United States. The Tibetans were impressed with what Thomas was willing to do on their behalf and they expressed their desire for him “to present the facts about Tibetan independence to America and to the world.” They added that Thomas would have to apply for readmission to Tibet if he were to return. The language used by the Tibetans is significant. The fact that the Tibetans insisted that Thomas reapply for admission to the country shows they were only willing to work with outsiders on their terms and they were desperately clinging to anything that would support their claim as an independent nation. This requirement was certainly reasonable, but even when they clearly understood that they were faced with an impending invasion they continued to hold to their strict adherence to avoiding foreigners, even one who appeared to be very willing to help them in their current predicament.

The members of the Kashag revealed their grave concern over Tibet’s future with the Chinese communists on their borders. They asked what America would do to help quickly in the event of an invasion. Thomas again responded that only the American people could answer that question and it would take public opinion to convince the US legislature to send aid to Tibet. Thomas stressed that the American public would have to be presented with the facts first and he assured the Tibetans that he would do is best in this regard. He also promised that he would put the matter before Acheson and President Truman; at this point in his visit, Thomas apparently

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72 Ibid. Thomas did not return to Tibet until 1977.
73 Ibid.
believed that the US would help as a nation or he would be able to influence the US government
to support Tibet.\textsuperscript{74}

The senior minister of the Foreign Office, Kalon Lama, had more pointed questions for
Thomas. Kalon Lama asked him if communism would “keep spreading across Asia?”\textsuperscript{75} Thomas
responded: “No one can answer that difficult question. But in my opinion Communism may not
have a lasting effect on China’s age-old culture and civilization. Chinese life up to now has
always centered on the family and on religion and both are institutions which Red doctrine
opposes. Even if Communism is not entirely cast off, China may modify it to such an extent that
it is no longer a part of a Moscow-directed scheme for world conquest.”\textsuperscript{76}

Thomas’s conversation with Kalon Lama raises an intriguing aspect of Thomas’s mind-
set while he was in Tibet. He did not appear to fully appreciate the current political situation
between China and Tibet. By 1949, Thomas had worked as a newsman for thirty-seven years
and it was second nature for him to be aware of world events. He was better informed
concerning the situation between China and Tibet than a vast majority of Americans, and he had
been reporting on the spread of communism in China regularly during his radio news show.\textsuperscript{77} In
a letter to Loy Henderson, Thomas wrote “now might be an ideal time to visit Tibet, because of
the natural desire of the Tibetans not to be absorbed by any of their powerful neighbors –
meaning Russia.”\textsuperscript{78} In spite of Sudyam Cutting’s advice that Thomas travel to Tibet before it

\begin{footnotes}
\item[74] Ibid.
\item[75] Thomas, Jr., \textit{Out of This World}, 238-39.
\item[76] Ibid.
\item[77] Microfiche – Lowell Thomas Radio News Broadcasts, 1 January – 30 June 1949, Box 430, LTP. Thomas
broadcast at least fifty-one news stories on his radio news show between January 1, 1949 and June 30, 1949
concerning China and the spread of communism.
\item[78] Lowell Thomas to Loy W. Henderson, 22 June, 1949, Box 476, Folder 6, LTP.
\end{footnotes}

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was too late and the obvious concern of the Tibetans, Thomas still believed that Russia was the primary threat to Tibet in the summer of 1949.

Kalon Lama said that he hoped that Thomas was correct. The next question from the Foreign Minister was even more difficult for Thomas to answer. He asked if the US would come to Tibet’s aid if the Communists did attack. Thomas was in an awkward position. He and his son were private citizens and had not come to Tibet as official representatives of the United States government. Thomas wanted to be encouraging but ultimately stated, once again, that he believed “our country would be sympathetic, but material aid would depend chiefly on United States public opinion as reflected in the action of Congress.” They were asked these questions many times while in Lhasa and the monks and lay officials did not find their responses adequate. Unlike during Thomas’s exchange with Chilean President Juan Antonio Rios, he failed to directly state that he was not a US government official.

Thomas did not immediately understand the investment Tibet had in his arrival. To the Tibetans, Thomas and his son represented the US government or at least major governmental connections. Cold War language was being issued by Tibetan officials for the first time during this period. In an interview with the Thomases, Tsepon Shakabpa stated that, “[he] feels his country in the new Atomic Age must enlarge its circle of friends or it will be engulfed by the Red tide that is sweeping over Asia.” Thomas viewed Russia, not China, as the larger concern, and like most Americans of the time, he viewed communism as a world-wide conspiracy being controlled by the Soviet Union.

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79 *Out of This World* [Book], Book Excerpt, Box 470, Folder 5, LTP.
80 Ibid.
81 Broadcast transcript of Lowell Thomas, Jr., from Tibet 29 August 1949, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
The Thomases had an opportunity to view Tibet’s military first-hand and quickly realized the Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army was ill equipped to deal with an invasion. At the time, the army consisted of 10,000 troops armed with weaponry from WWI. It was said that 100,000 more men were being mobilized, but the Tibetan military leaders had little or no knowledge of military developments over the past several decades. Diplomatically, the Commander-in-Chief was quite savvy. He suggested the best way to end their troubles would be if the Western world recognized Tibet as a sovereign nation and was admitted to the United Nations.

In some cases, Thomas was asked to help explain the communist mentality to the Tibetans. Tsarong Shapé, a Tibetan Cabinet Minister, asked the Thomases during a meeting if it were true that the Russians had no religion. Thomas responded that the Russians, from the Politburo on down, apparently had only the religion of communism and world revolution. He was, of course, giving his opinion as an American capitalist, who regularly attended a Christian church when he was home in Pawling, NY. As a follow-up question, Shapé asked if the Russian people were told the truth about world events and Thomas replied that they were not. Shapé shared his thoughts on Tibet’s current situation. He believed that the sum of the world’s problems were greed and self-interest. His ultimate solution to these evils was a world government, but he could not envision its creation due to the aforementioned problems. However, he did not resign himself to the inevitability of a war with China. He retained hope that “rival powers” may yet realize that global cooperation would be the only means of Tibet’s

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82 Thomas, Jr., *Out of This World*, 178.
83 Ibid., 189.
To a culture largely based on a highly structured religion, the threat of a communist takeover must have been a frightening anathema.

On September 3rd, well into their visit, the Thomases met with Hugh Richardson at his home close by Norbulingka. They enjoyed dinner with local officials and their children, and took more photos in Richardson’s garden. Richardson informed the Thomases that the People’s Republic of China had just declared its intention to “liberate” Tibet. It was worrying news and Richardson did not know if it was posturing, but he must have believed it was a very real threat. The following day Thomas met with Shakabpa again and he continued to ask Thomas what the US would do to help Tibet if the PRC remained in power. Thomas repeated what he had said to the members of the Kashag earlier, and he went on to tell Shakabpa what the US was doing in Iran to raise living standards, supply modern arms, and of the country’s petroleum wealth. Thomas also told Shakabpa of the philanthropist Max Thornburg and of the work he was doing in the Middle East, and suggested he might come with Thomas on a future visit to Lhasa to offer his counsel. Thornburg was a friend of Thomas’s and a mentor to Lowell, Jr., so it is not surprising that he recommended him as a possible advisor to the Tibetans. Shakabpa said he wished there were more people like Thornburg in the world, but he made no commitment to Thomas’s suggestions. Thomas must have made similar statements to Shapé, for he raised the concern that Tibetan mineral wealth could attract a “greedy power” and he did not think Tibet was ready to contend with the exploitation of its natural resources or offer concessions to a foreign country for such privileges.

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84 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.
85 Ibid.
86 “China and Britain Ready to Exploit Tibet’s Natural Resources.” The Telegraph, July 27, 2008, accessed on 12 November 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/energy/2793852/China-and-Britain-ready-to-exploit-Tibets-natural-resources.html. It was long believed by foreign governments (e.g. the UK, Soviet Union,
Tibet’s economy was based on agriculture when Thomas visited in 1949 and there was no significant industry or mining in the region. Traditional crafts were the primary goods Tibetans’ traded with foreign countries. The Tibetan government wanted to keep it this way in order to respect their traditional way of life. There was no attempt to industrialize Tibet until 1959. At that time the Chinese government began establishing factories to produce various goods, but in less than a decade they became a drain on China’s economy due to the difficulties associated with transporting materials within the region (e.g. cost of constructing roads and fuel costs) and an unskilled labor force. It has only been during the past decade that minerals have become a significant part of Tibet’s exports.

Shapé hoped that the rest of the world would agree to leave Tibet alone. The Thomases did not express their thoughts that if Tibet was to fall “into the American orbit” it must do so quickly, before the PRC realized Tibet’s intentions and invaded as a preventative action against the West. Thomas’s concern revealed that, although he had little apprehension over the immediacy of communist encroachment, he did understand the seriousness of the situation between Tibet and China, and that Mao Zedong would protect a region he believed to be under China’s control. However, most of the many suggestions he made to Tibetan officials to further US-Tibet relations would have required considerable time to mature.

The Thomases encountered other foreigners while in Tibet, including two Europeans. Heinrich Harrer, the Austrian explorer, skier, and author who wrote *Seven Years in Tibet*, was one individual of particular interest to Thomas because of their shared interests. Harrer was put in jail in China, and US) that Tibet held significant mineral deposits. The gold, uranium, and other mineral deposits are still a source of tension in Tibet today as the 2008 article in the *Telegraph* indicates.

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88 Ma Rong, *Population and Society in Tibet* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 161.
89 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., August 3 – September 1949, Box 484 Folder 19, LTP.
into a prison camp in India at the outbreak of WWII only to escape with another man into Tibet where he lived for seven years and became the Dalai Lama’s English teacher. They also met Reginald (Reggie) Fox, a British citizen, who had been in Tibet for thirteen years when the Thomases arrived. He was married to a Tibetan woman with whom he had four children. Fox operated a radio transmitter in Lhasa and monitored the foreign news for the Tibetan government. Not surprisingly, he became indispensable to Tibet during the upheaval in China. Among his other responsibilities he operated a 16mm film projector for the Dalai Lama and he asked Thomas to send him films such as “Tarzan” or anything exciting that didn’t involve death.  

On September 4th, the Thomases were invited to a state luncheon at the Foreign Ministers Office. They sat with two ministers and the father of the new Dzong Pen (the governor) of Phari. It was a feast that consisted of many and varied courses, such as yak’s tongue and Jell-O. Lowell, Jr. photographed the ministers and members of the Kashag in a courtyard, which ended the formal state luncheon. The Thomases were there to be entertained and no business was discussed concerning communist China or trade relations, which must have been a relief after so many official meetings.

One of the Thomases final visits was to the Sera monastery in Treda Linga. They went on a cold and rainy day, and they were pleased to be greeted with European tea and sweet cakes. Thomas wanted to better understand Buddhism and to learn the best way to explain this Eastern religion to his Western audience. The lamas replied that they would stress the core Buddhist beliefs: the Lord Buddha, the scriptures, and the lamas. A Buddhist must lead a good and

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90 Ibid.  
91 Ibid.
generous life, thinking always of brotherly love. This practice would ensure the Buddhist reincarnation on a higher plain. He would be born a high official or a wealthy man, but anyone leading a sinful life would be born a beggar, or worst of all, an animal.\textsuperscript{92}

The Thomases departed Lhasa after spending eleven days meeting numerous officials, photographing, filming, and recording Tibetans and their surroundings, and making radio broadcasts. They left on a lucky day (Monday, Wednesday, or Sundays were considered lucky by Tibetans) and their journey back to Calcutta started off well;\textsuperscript{93} however, five days into their return trip Thomas was thrown from his horse. He landed on a pile of rocks and was unable to stand or ride due to his obviously severe, but not fully understood, injuries. Their medical kit was inadequate for the situation, containing only aspirin, and supplies to care for minor cuts and bruises. Thomas was wrapped in a sleeping bag and placed on an army cot and was carried by Lowell, Jr. and Tibetan bearers to the nearest village. The town was only four miles away but it was nearly four hours before they reached shelter. They did not know if his leg or hip was broken and Thomas spent an agonizing night with a high fever, fighting to stay conscious. The next morning Lowell, Jr. hiked to a village with a phone (they were fortunate to be near one), and contacted one of the four doctors in Tibet. Dr. Pal traveled forty miles and reached Thomas in the evening. He explained that he was drafted into the Indian army before completing his medical training and was unsure if Thomas had broken a bone. He thought it might just be torn ligaments. Pal placed Thomas’s leg in a splint and the caravan had to continue on as best it could, with up to ten people at a time carrying Thomas over treacherous mountain passes. They reached the village Gyantse where they stayed with Pal, in his home, for two weeks. Once they continued their journey Thomas was carried in a sedan chair and was forced to walk for short

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
periods of time when the trails became too narrow for the Tibetans to negotiate while carrying him. It took sixteen days to travel 200 miles and they were met in Yantung by a rescue party sent by the United States Ambassador at New Delhi. Thomas and his son were flown on a US Air Force plane to Calcutta, and then back to New York. It was discovered that his leg was broken in eight places just below the hip. His leg was surgically repaired and he was skiing in Alaska less than a year later.94

The Thomases alternated recording radio broadcasts on their battery powered equipment every evening during their journey until Thomas’s accident and it was clear from the start that they found Tibet fascinating. In a broadcast during the early stages of their journey Thomas exclaimed, “There is almost nothing about a Tibetan journey that is like anything else on earth. This is the land of Lost Horizon. No planes, trains, trams, autos, bicycles – not a wheel in Tibet. Yet it is a land with an ancient and highly developed civilization of its own, utterly unlike our western civilization which has now affected all other countries all but this.”95 Their broadcasts focused on what Thomas thought would most appeal to his American audience. His familiar practice of focusing on the most exotic aspects of a foreign region and culture was in full evidence from his first few recordings. Thomas included stories about his mule treading within six inches of an abyss at an altitude of 12,600 feet, eating purple strawberries, crossing tiger trails, and the “polygamous habits” of nomadic Tibetan women.96

Thomas’s news reports included stories about the people, customs, scenery, religion, dress, history, flora, and fauna he encountered, but he avoided the purely political. How Thomas handled this aspect of his broadcasts is an important point in this history. In spite of the fact that

94 Ibid.
95 Tibet Broadcasts – Bound Volume, “From Gautsa on to Phari” broadcast, recorded in August 1949, p. 1, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
96 Ibid. Thomas appeared to enjoy commenting on the more exotic nature of Tibetan sexual behavior.
he did not believe communist encroachment from China was an immediate threat, he did use the fear of communism in the West as one of his main tools in trying to sway American public opinion to support Tibet. Not surprisingly, he relied on anecdotes to influence his audience. For instance, he preferred to tell the story of the communist threat through the people he met. A Tibetan man they encountered informed Thomas he was returning from China after a five year stay because the communists had overthrown the Nationalists and that all his countrymen would be leaving China as well because, “Tibetans don’t want anything to do with the Reds.”97 All of Thomas’s reports were very pro-Tibet and they stressed how Tibetans shared many of the same ideals as his American audience. The Tibetan officials he met were welcoming to their American guests and they believed the Thomases’ visit was very important to the Tibetan government. Every special courtesy availed to the Thomases, from their passports providing them with the rare honor to travel where they would in Tibet, to the traditions and protocols that were broken to expedite the Thomases access to the Dalai Lama and government officials, were noted in his news stories. Thomas was providing an enthralling tale of his latest adventure and reinforcing the evils of communism to his listening audience, but he was also setting the stage for the more elaborate travelogues he was intending to produce when he returned to the US. His desire to help the Tibetans may have been inspired in part by wanting to preserve their culture, but he also was anti-communist and wanted to help stop the spread of what he perceived as a threat to the American way of life.

Thomas’s experiences during the summer of 1949 persuaded him to become an advocate for Tibetans, to support Tibet’s cause of becoming an independent nation and being free from China’s control, or at least from communist control. He was the first individual to take up

97 Ibid. Thomas described an encounter with a Tibetan returning from China after a five year stay in his Gangtok broadcast on pages three and four of the transcript.
Tibet’s cause in such a significant manner – as an advocate with a direct connection to every mass media outlet in America. He put Tibet in the media in a way it had not been done before – through dozens of radio news stories, magazine articles, books, and films – and he brought Tibet’s concerns to the attention of the US government. Thomas traveled to Tibet with the intention of producing a travelogue and then moving on to his next travel adventure. He did produce his travelogue, but he remained an active advocate for Tibet for the rest of his life.

An important aspect to understanding this historic moment is the phrasing of Tibetan concern over Chinese encroachment. While the Tibetans had indicated their desire for independence from Chiang Kai-shek’s government and expressed their resistance to Chiang’s overtures to the Thomases, the focus of Thomas’s message about Tibetan sovereignty was not primarily anti-Chinese, but rather anti-communist, and he sent this message to his radio listening audience. Thomas and his son also captured many aspects of Tibetan culture that were lost after China invaded. His broadcasts brought Tibet’s perspective of the world to an American audience that was eager to hear about Thomas’s adventures in Shangri-La. Thomas would also use his governmental connections to discuss Tibet’s plight.

Considering the US government’s attitude toward China and Asia in general during the summer of 1949, it is surprising that the State Department did not take more of an interest in Thomas’s request to travel to Lhasa. Even if the US was taking a hands-off stance towards that part of Asia, it is puzzling that a high-profile newsman would not be asked to gather information on a political hotspot and report his findings to the White House. The lack of interest in Thomas’s well publicized journey to Lhasa by the State Department and Dean Acheson, although unexpected, can be, at least, partially explained by the US government’s attitude concerning China and Asia during this time period. In August of 1949, Acheson and the State
Department produced a study officially known as the *United States Relations with China with Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949*, which later became more commonly known as the *China White Paper*. The Sino-American relations study announced a hands-off policy towards the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China, arguing that any intervention on the part of the American government was destined to fail. ⁹⁸ Acheson and President Truman intended the study to dispel any conjecture that their administration had been unsuccessful in checking the spread of communism in China, but their plan back-fired and the paper only fueled speculation by critics that the US government’s actions were inadequate to forestall the People’s Republic of China’s rise to power.⁹⁹

The political relationship between China and the US transformed from friendly to adversarial when the People’s Republic of China overthrew the Republic of China. Mao Zedong officially declared the establishment of his new government on October 1, 1949, and a few months later Acheson made what became regarded as one of the most important and controversial US policy statements in the early history of the Cold War in Asia. The Secretary of State delivered a speech at the National Press Club on January 12, 1950, in which he defined the American "defensive perimeter" in the Pacific as a line running through Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines. ¹⁰⁰ This denied guaranteed US military protection to the Republic of China, which had moved its overthrown government to Taiwan, establishing Taipei as its temporary capital. Acheson's speech outlined what the Truman administration believed were the realistic military capabilities of the US in Asia at the time. The Secretary of State stated that beyond

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Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines, "it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas against military attack." If open aggression occurred outside the defensive perimeter drawn by the US, "the initial reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it and then upon... the United Nations which so far has not proved a weak reed to lean on by any people who are determined to protect their independence against outside aggression."\textsuperscript{101}

Acheson and Truman wanted to avoid any immediate risk of war with Asia, so they established an easily defensible line to protect America's vital interests, and enacted a long-term political program for Asia which could be implemented by peaceful means.\textsuperscript{102} In spite of the years-long civil war in China which resulted in a communist takeover, Acheson believed that the military threat was not as great as the challenge of political “subversion and penetration.”\textsuperscript{103} Korea was Truman’s main concern in 1949 and 1950, and he was not ready to consider any US-Asian involvement beyond this. Tibet reached out to a Western power for aid at a time when the request went against US foreign policy and yet the President of the United States was willing to listen to Thomas and his son discuss their experiences in Tibet shortly after their return. For their part, the Thomases would tell their Tibet story to the US government and to the American public. In both cases their goal was bringing aid to the Tibetan people, but what help they could actually offer was yet to be determined.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Tang Tsou, \textit{America's Failure in China, 1941-1950} (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 536.
\textsuperscript{103} Matray, “Dean Acheson's Press Club Speech.”
CHAPTER FIVE

Cold Warriors and Self-Appointed Diplomats:
The Thomases in Washington, DC, 1949-1951

World events kept spinning on while Thomas and his son were in Tibet. The Chinese National government was collapsing under the assault of communism; the Soviets were testing atomic weapons; folk singer and social activist Pete Seeger, a self-proclaimed communist, was assaulted for his leftist beliefs after performing a concert in aid of civil rights in the US; and Moscow and North Korea were considering the political and international ramifications of invading South Korea. Only a few years after the end of WWII, Thomas was reporting on the USSR consolidating its control over states in the Eastern Bloc and the expansion of US global power. His broadcasts were also providing hints to his listening audience concerning how the developing Cold War would not only affect politics, but the American economy, culture, and society.¹ Months later Thomas would be regularly discussing the rise of Mao Zedong’s Communist Party in China on the radio. China emerged as a guiding factor in shaping the Cold War globally and ultimately communist China played a central role in the Korean War, the Taiwan Strait Crisis, and the Vietnam War.² These world events pulled America deeper and deeper into a Cold War mentality, increasing the fear of communist encroachment in the US. During the summer of 1949 Thomas gained first-hand knowledge of Asia’s role in the Cold War when he traveled to Tibet with his son. His perpetual optimism led him to promise the Tibetan government that he would “do all he could to enlist US aid ‘if it could be done in time.’”³

¹ David Halberstam, The Fifties (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1993). Halberstam provided an excellent overview of the beginning of the Cold War and the impact it had on the US in the 1950s.
² Chen Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Chen discussed the role China played in shaping the Cold War in Asia and around the globe.
events were shaping up for another round of global upheavals when the Thomases were in a political and geographic hotspot.

Thomas was one of the most popular radio personalities of his day, and it has been estimated that he was heard by approximately 125 billion people during the course of his radio news show.\(^4\) He took pride in trying to deliver a “middle-of-the-road” account of the news of the day, striving to keep his political interests out of his reports, but journalism was just one aspect of Thomas’s career. He was also a major player in the publishing, television, and movie industries, and had enough influence and respect from the White House to request and receive a meeting with the President in short order. This chapter will explore Thomas’s interactions with the US government upon his return from Lhasa, the White House’s stance concerning Tibet, and whether Thomas was in fact a cold warrior.

In 1947, President Truman pledged to contain communism around the world. The Truman Doctrine impelled the US to support any anticommunist regimes that were being threatened by internal or external authoritarian forces with political, military, and economic assistance. This new policy dramatically reoriented US foreign policy away from withdrawing from conflicts on foreign soil not directly involving the US, to one of possible intervention, effectively placing the US in the role of global policeman. Before a joint session of Congress Truman said, “it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”\(^5\) Truman believed that a totalitarian regime that placed a free society under its control represented a threat to international peace and the national security of the US. “The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by

\(^4\) Thomas, *Good Evening Everybody*, 312.

misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive. The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own Nation.” Yet in 1949, the President appeared to back away from his Doctrine when Acheson presented the China White Paper, severely limiting which Asian countries the US would support if threatened by communist regimes.

The line in the Pacific drawn by the White House in the China White Paper was presumably bad news for Tibet or any country in Asia that happened to sit beyond this new defensive perimeter. However, the US would not totally ignore its assets in Asia, including Tibet, during the early stages of the Cold War. Prior to 1949, the Tibetan government’s history with the US government was not particularly meaningful or productive during the first half of the twentieth-century; as was discussed in previous chapters, contact between the two government was sporadic at best. Truman had very little interaction with Tibet before the Thomases returned from Asia. He had assumed the presidency after Roosevelt’s death in 1945, but his administration was not contacted by Lhasa until 1948. A Tibetan trade mission was sent to the US in August of 1948 and the Dalai Lama wrote to Truman requesting that he aid the trade mission, which was headed by Tsepon Shakabpa. A few months later Shakabpa sent a telegram

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6 President Truman’s Message to Congress; March 12, 1947; Document 171; 80th Congress, 1st Session; Records of the United States House of Representatives; Record Group 233; National Archives, retrieved from www.ourdocuments.gov on 21 November 2015.
to Truman congratulating him on his success in the presidential election. In both instances Truman did not reply.

Truman’s White House had little time to think about Tibet during the late 1940s, being more concerned with European postwar recovery, the Soviet blockade of Berlin, and the establishment of NATO in response to the USSR’s Cold War actions. Even when Tibet garnered considerable attention from Washington a few years later, different US government agencies appeared to apply different policies towards the region. This certainly seemed to be the case when it came to the CIA, the White House, and the State Department. Truman and Acheson had clearly established how far the US was willing to go to extend aid to Asia in the *China White Paper*, but the CIA was still considering what actions and strategies were feasible to deter or defeat communism in Asia. In a series of memoranda the CIA laid out its plans for providing military aid to Asian countries in danger of falling under communist control and strategies to disrupt established communist regimes. Perhaps because Langley’s activities so starkly contrasted with the US government’s public stance on what it would and would not do to support Asian countries, the CIA did not share its intelligence with the State Department, Army, Navy, or the Air Force.

The CIA was looking for vulnerabilities in the communist movement in Asian countries because it believed that communism in Asia was susceptible to military, economic, and political attack. Langley was working on the theory that all Asian countries had similar weaknesses and

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8 Ibid. Summary of a telegram from Tsepon Shakabpa to President Truman, which congratulated him on his election as President of the United States, 5 November 1948.
9 Papers of Harry S. Truman, SMOF, National Security Council Files. Central Intelligence Agency File. Box 1, Intelligence Memoranda File, December, 1948 – December, 1949 (1 of 2), Truman Library. Intelligence Memorandum No. 255, 9 December 1949. A note at the bottom of the first page of the memorandum stated that the report had “not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Department of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.”
that a single strategic plan could be applied to discourage communism in that part of the world.\textsuperscript{10} The CIA did not have any illusions that communism in the Soviet Union could be deposed with anything short of a major Western military confrontation. However, China was a different matter. The CIA believed that China suffered from a variety of internal weaknesses, which if effectively exploited could lead to the downfall of communism, or at least a lessening of its hostility towards the West.\textsuperscript{11} Economic problems, inflationary pressures, food shortages, the unavailability of industrial materials and skilled labor, and poor communication and transportation systems were all areas for the US to use to its advantage. US trade controls could help the Nationalist blockade that was in place in China in 1949, which in turn could potentially cost the communist Chinese regime its popular support. The CIA also pointed to the resentment that the communist regime had caused amongst the Chinese people by the disruption of centuries long traditions.\textsuperscript{12} It was also believed that the communist movement would become threatened as colonial areas realized an ambition for independence, which partially explains the massive decolonization that was occurring at the time. The prevailing theory in the Central Intelligence Agency was that assistance from the West during decolonization would help eliminate economic and social conditions that were susceptible to the exploitation of communists. The CIA also recognized that any efforts to exploit these vulnerabilities could provoke communist counter-action. US success would depend on early seizure of initiatives.\textsuperscript{13} In order to aid these initiatives, on October 6, 1949, the US Congress passed a military assistance act providing $75 million for direct support for the “existing legitimate governments or anti-Communist groups” in

\textsuperscript{10} Papers of Harry S. Truman, SMOF, National Security Council Files. Central Intelligence Agency File. Box 1, Intelligence Memoranda File, December, 1948 – December, 1949 (2 of 2). Intelligence Memorandum No. 209, 20 September 1949, Truman Library. This document was classified as secret.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., Thomas also cited the disruption of long established traditions as a reason that communism would not take hold in China during his meetings with Tibetan officials.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, and China (including Taiwan and Tibet); and a contingency reserve fund of $40 million, half for Taiwan and half for Southeast Asia.”

In some instances decolonization was an orderly process and in other cases it was chaotic and involved prolonged revolution. Even countries that were on the same side in their efforts to fight the spread of communism, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, became entangled in contentious disputes over the decolonization process in Asia. After the end of WWII Britain realized that it would have to give up its colonies in “East and Southeast Asia as part of a general strategy to harmonise [sic] relations with the United States.”

While all of this plotting concerning communism was going on in Washington, Thomas was on his way back to the US, and he was already paving the way for bringing Tibet to the attention of the US government and the American public. On October 11, 1949, while in Calcutta, he announced that he found Tibet to be the “most anti-communist country in the world.” A few days later on October 16th, LaGuardia Airport saw the return of Lowell Thomas and Lowell, Jr. to the US. Immediately after hobbling off the plane on his wooden crutches, Thomas held a press conference and announced that Tibet’s rulers “would like to know if they can get aid” from the US if communists try to take over their country. The press also learned that Thomas was carrying messages from the Dalai Lama for President Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Tibetans were concerned over a recent announcement by Chinese communists that they planned “to free Tibet.” Thomas asserted that Tibetans “object to anything

14 Stueck, Jr. The Road to Confrontation, 138.
15 Simon C. Smith, Ending Empire in the Middle East: Britain, the United States and Post-war Decolonization, 1945-1973 (New York: Routledge, 2012), 191. Smith discussed the tension building between the US and UK over methods used during decolonization in the Middle East and Asia.
Western, but they would change in a final showdown rather than lose their country.”\textsuperscript{19} He continued by stating that the US could provide the Tibetan military with modern weapons and teach them guerilla warfare “which would make it more difficult for the Chinese Communists to approach on the North.”\textsuperscript{20} Thomas believed that for the first time in history a US military presence could be established in Tibet.

Thomas’s LaGuardia press conference was the start of an unlikely conversation with the White House. What originally started as a desire to fulfill a life-long ambition as an explorer transformed into Thomas appointing himself as an unofficial ambassador to Tibet. Despite that the \textit{China White Paper} was only released a few months prior to Thomas’s return and that he unabashedly called for aid from the Washington on Tibet’s behalf, potentially putting the White House in an awkward position, President Truman and Secretary of State Acheson readily agreed to meet with Thomas and his son to discuss their Tibet expedition. Thomas made no secret of what was on his mind; he wanted to discuss what the US could do to help the Tibetan government resist the swelling communist tide that was threatening to overwhelm them. Considering this, and Truman’s recent declaration of a hands-off policy concerning China, it is surprising that Thomas’s very public request to meet with Truman was not immediately met with a response explaining why the US could not become involved in this situation in Asia. Not only was there no rebuff from the White House, Thomas’s concerns for Tibet appeared to gain traction with the President and Secretary of State.

Thomas began his official communications with Washington concerning Tibet just a few days after returning to the airwaves. Acheson’s office received a transcript of Thomas’s first

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
news broadcast from New York along with a letter thanking the Secretary of State for all the help Thomas received from the Foreign Service Office after his accident leaving Lhasa.\textsuperscript{21} Thomas’s first live broadcast after returning from Tibet interwove his experiences in Tibet with the news of the day and finished with Lowell, Jr. commenting on the many difficulties they faced in getting his father out of Tibet after he broke his leg.\textsuperscript{22} Acheson noted the concern America felt when word of Thomas’s accident reached the US and he was very appreciative of Thomas’s grateful commendation of the help he received from the Foreign Service Office, particularly the medical attention they provided in India and all the arrangements they made to fly him and his son back to New York.

Thomas was not only anxious to speak with Acheson; he also wanted to meet with President Truman and the US Ambassador to India, Loy Henderson. A radio news wire story released by the United Press stated that Thomas was bringing messages back for Truman from the Tibetan government and he wanted to discuss the contents of the story with the Secretary of State at his earliest convenience.\textsuperscript{23} Thomas was pleased the story came out, but he was also concerned that he would not be able to travel to Washington to personally meet with Truman and Acheson for several weeks due to his injury. He was anxious to start discussing the possibility of sending US aid to Tibet to help them keep communism out of the region. Thomas believed Tibet should be independent, but he apparently assumed that he could make his most convincing case for the US to support Tibet by focusing on the communist threat and the fear it had induced.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{21} Secretary of State’s office to Lowell Thomas, 26 October 1949, Acheson Papers. Secretary of State File, Alphabetical File, 1945-1972, Box 44, File 44-3, Truman Library. The letter referred to Thomas’s letter of thanks for the aid he received from the Foreign Service Office in India. The October 26\textsuperscript{th} date indicates that Thomas must have sent the broadcast from his October 17\textsuperscript{th} broadcast a few days after his news show aired.
\footnote{22} Ibid. Thomas’s first broadcast after returning from Tibet aired on October 17, 1949. The copy of the transcript Thomas sent to the State Department was saved in the Acheson Papers.
\footnote{23} Lowell Thomas to Dean Acheson, 25 October 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library.
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across America. In a letter dated October 25, 1949, Thomas explained to Acheson that the Tibetan government assumed he and his son were US government officials due to the endorsements they had received from Ambassador Loy Henderson, Sir Girja Bajpai, and Sudyam Cutting. Tibetan officials spoke of little but the sweep of communism across China and looked to Thomas as a means of securing aid from the US. Thomas wanted to fulfill this mission.

Acheson responded to Thomas’s message with encouragement and enthusiasm. He expressed how anxious he and his associates in the State Department were to receive a first-hand report of his impressions and experiences in Tibet. Thomas, as he had feared, was forbidden to travel by his doctors, but Acheson hoped that Thomas’s son would be able to visit Washington, DC soon. If a meeting with Lowell, Jr. was possible, he urged him to meet with Elbert G. Matthews, Director of the Office of South Asian Affairs, upon his arrival in DC. Thomas grudgingly listened to the advice of his doctors. He was able to broadcast from the hospital after his surgery and then from his home, but otherwise he was told his time should be spent convalescing from the surgery required to repair his shattered limb, not traveling to Washington. Thomas was eager to share messages from the Tibetan government with the White House and he was concerned about what Truman and Acheson would think about “the heads of the Dalai Lama’s government regard[ing] us as representatives of the American people.”

Thomas willingly offered to have his son travel to Washington by himself if Truman and Acheson wanted to meet with him before Thomas had recovered sufficiently from his surgery to travel.

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24 Ibid., Thomas’s October 25th, 1949 letter to Acheson includes the first mention of why the Tibetan government believed Thomas a US government official.
25 Dean Acheson to Lowell Thomas, 28 October 1949, Acheson Papers. Secretary of State File, Alphabetical File, 1945-1972, Box 44, File 44-3, Truman Library. Acheson expressed his understanding of why Thomas was not able to travel to DC to provide a first-hand report due to his injury, but he also expressed his desire to meet with Thomas personally once he was cleared to travel by his doctor.
26 Lowell Thomas to Charlie Ross [Truman’s Press Secretary], 25 October 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library. Thomas enclosed a copy of a letter he wrote to Acheson on the same day.
Suggesting that the meeting occur without him was something Thomas would not ordinarily have done, but his visit to Lhasa had convinced him that Tibet had “become of vast strategic importance, because of the sweep of Communism across Asia, and the fact that Tibet shares a thirteen hundred mile frontier with India.”\textsuperscript{27} Six days after Thomas sent his letter to Acheson he received a reply from Matthew J. Connelly, the Secretary to the President, requesting that Lowell, Jr. meet with Truman to report about their time in Tibet.\textsuperscript{28} The quick response from the White House indicates a high level of interest from Truman concerning the Thomases’ experiences in Tibet. Lowell, Jr. met with President Truman on November 9\textsuperscript{th}, without his father.\textsuperscript{29}

The meeting went well. Truman poured over the map of Tibet that Lowell, Jr. had brought with him and the President talked about how he wished he could visit Lhasa, but that he would probably never have the opportunity to travel to that remote city.\textsuperscript{30} He told Lowell, Jr. that he had followed the radio reports and newspaper accounts of his and his father’s journey and that he expected to attend the Thomases’ travelogue lecture, which they were planning to give in Washington at the National Geographic Society in February of 1950. The younger Thomas’s report of his experiences in Tibet led to Truman recommending that he meet with members of

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Correspondence from Matthew J. Connelly, Secretary to the President, to Lowell Thomas, 31 October 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library. Lowell Thomas, Jr.’s appointment with President Truman was scheduled for November 9, 1949 at 12:30 p.m.
\textsuperscript{29} Telegram from Lowell Thomas to Matthew J. Connelly, Secretary to the President, 4 November 1949, 4:49 p.m. Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library. Thomas confirmed that Lowell, Jr. would meet with Truman at the suggested time and he advised Connelly that he could be contacted at Harkness Pavilion Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City.
\textsuperscript{30} Thomas, Jr., \textit{Out of This World}, 310. Unfortunately, Truman’s account of this meeting does not appear to exist.
the State Department and the Secretary of the Air Force; Lowell, Jr. was questioned for several hours while meeting with Air Force officials.  

There is ample evidence that various US government agencies were considering measures to bring aid to Asian countries beyond the line Acheson drew from the Aleutian Islands to Japan, and through the Ryukyu Islands. In December of 1949, the Central Intelligence Agency was preparing for possible emergency demands for US military aid. The CIA cited “the developing threat of Chinese Communist aggression and the existing threat posed by actively insurgent or potentially subversive groups within most Southeast Asian countries” as the two most likely reasons for military aid to be requested. Tibet was pointed to as a likely target for communist encroachment, along with Indochina, Thailand, and Burma. The CIA expressed serious concerns that a domino effect would occur if one of China’s borders states fell. If this happened then the threat of communism spreading to other countries would only increase. Tibet was identified as one of several Asian countries where a demand for US military aid might develop. CIA officials were already aware that Lowell Thomas, Jr. delivered the Tibetan government’s official request for US civil and military aid to the White House, and China had professed its determination that Tibet remain a part of China, while Tibet was equally adamant that it would resist an invasion force. The CIA realized that there would be significant problems

31 Undated and unaddressed letter from Lowell Thomas, Box 469, Folder 9, LTP. The letter described Lowell, Jr.’s experiences with President Truman and in Washington, as well as the Thomases’ plans to start writing articles and present lectures concerning their Tibet expedition. The letter must have been written after Lowell, Jr.’s meeting with President Truman (November 9, 1949) and before their Washington lecture (February 1950).
32 Intelligence Memorandum No. 255, 9 December 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman, SMOF, National Security Council Files. Central Intelligence Agency File. Box 1, Intelligence Memoranda File, December, 1948 – December, 1949 (1 of 2), Truman Library. This lengthy document listed many South Asian countries, including Tibet, and the potential “problems of access,” “political complications,” and “problems of use.” The memo noted at the bottom of the first page that it had “not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Department of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.”
with providing aid to Tibet, but they were not the political issues that concerned the White House and the State Department.

Truman and Acheson were worried about involving the US in renewed military action in Asia, or causing China to invade Tibet as a preemptive action in response to the US declaring itself as Tibet’s protector. The CIA did not share these fears and was more interested in the practical aspects of sending aid to Tibet. Topographical difficulties and the communist government in China prevented the US from entering Tibet anywhere on the ground except India. Dropping supplies by air was limited by the low cargo capacity required for aircrafts that attempted to fly over the Himalayas and the lack of landing fields in Tibet was also a problem. When it came to the political situation between Tibet and the US, the CIA appeared to believe that the time was ripe to send aid to Tibet. The Tibetan government was suddenly “receptive to U.S. aid and U.S. advisers.” In spite of Acheson’s public statements to the contrary, the CIA seemed to be implying that it would be desirable to bring Tibet into the fold. The report also suggested that the governments of India, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom would look favorably on such a relationship between Tibet and US, if it meant “the exclusion of Communism, or Chinese influence in any form, from Tibet.” Again, the CIA appears to be taking the opposite stance from the White House, which shows there were at least two different camps in the US government, those who believed Tibet would be an asset to the US and deserved direct US assistance (those who agreed with Thomas) and the other that believed that aiding Tibet would potentially bring the US into renewed military action in Asia or prompt China to invade Tibet in response to US support of Tibet. The only problems the CIA foresaw

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33 Ibid. This document was classified as “Top Secret.”
34 Ibid.
were the Tibetans’ “limited technical ability and education.”\textsuperscript{35} Due to this, the CIA believed, the Tibetan military would only be able to handle the simplest of weapons. Light weaponry appropriate for mountain warfare was recommended, as well as explosives to help defend the limited number of invasion routes available to the Chinese. The CIA apparently was operating under its own directive and did not communicate its strategy concerning Asia to the State Department, Army, Navy, or the Air Force.\textsuperscript{36} “The CIA did not, as advertised to the public and the Congress, function primarily as a central clearinghouse and producer of national intelligence for the government. Its basic mission was that of clandestine operations, particularly covert action, and the secret intervention in the internal affairs of other nations.”\textsuperscript{37}

In spite of the plea for help that Thomas and his son had delivered to the White House on Tibet’s behalf, Washington did not consider the request official until the Tibetan Foreign Bureau formally appealed for aid from President Truman on December 22, 1949. The Tibetan representatives stated Tibet had been an independent country for thirty years and had not experienced any trouble from outside forces during that time. However, they could not ignore the Chinese communist’s claims that Tibet was Chinese territory or the Chinese forces occupying areas along their border. In response to these actions by the Chinese communists, Tibet would “lead a special Mission to your country [the US] for the purpose of obtaining aid from your Government.”\textsuperscript{38}

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\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. The report made it clear that the CIA did not have a high opinion of the Tibetans military capabilities. \\
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. A note at the bottom of the first page of the memorandum stated that the report had “not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Department of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.” \\
\textsuperscript{37} Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, \textit{The CIA and Cult of Intelligence} (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1980), xi. \\
\textsuperscript{38} Letter from the Tibetan Foreign Bureau to President Truman, 22 December 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman. Official File, 150. Misc. 1951-53 [1 of 2]. Box 760. File O.F. 150-E Tibet, Truman Library. The letter was signed by Dzasa Linsbar and Surkhanggsurpa, Joint Foreign Secretary.
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While interaction between the Tibetan government and the US government was gaining momentum, Thomas was not sitting idle. He communicated with high level officials in Washington, DC through informal channels. Thomas was friends with Stuart Symington, who in 1949 was the US Secretary of the Air Force, and he kept Symington up-to-date concerning his work with Tibet through personal letters and Lowell, Jr. met with Symington late in December of 1949. 39

There was one, presumably unintentional, misstep that the Thomases made prior to Lowell, Jr. meeting with the President that may have cost them some credibility with the White House. Lowell, Jr. delivered a scroll to Truman that was purportedly from the Dalai Lama. The scroll was dated “the sixteenth day of the seventh month of the year of the Earth Bull year [September 7, 1949].” The English translation Lowell, Jr. presented to Truman read:

Now that Lowell Thomas, Sr., and Lowell Thomas, Jr., have been able to visit Tibet they are well acquainted with all the facts about this country. Therefore, the government of Tibet hopes that from them the President of the United States, the people of America, and those who live in other countries as well, will soon come to know more about Tibet. That it is a holy, independent country, a religious country, ruled over by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, who is the true Incarnation of Chenrezi, the Buddha of Mercy. Furthermore, that all Tibetans, including the civilian population as well as the monks, are entirely devoted to religion.

We have learned that unfortunately, throughout this world at the present time, there is an absence of peace and happiness—this because of troubles between peoples, and disturbances and conflicts of many kinds. We, the government and people of Tibet, are much worried, deeply concerned over the present state of the world in which we all live. And we are eager to have it known that here in Tibet, a land that is especially dedicated to religion, all of our peoples, both lay and monk, are earnestly praying the God will grant happiness and everlasting peace to all humanity. 40

40 Thomas, Jr., *Out of This World*, 310-311.
Truman’s staff had the scroll examined by a librarian from the Library of Congress and a Mongolian Lama at Johns Hopkins University named Ti-lu-wa.\textsuperscript{41} The Library of Congress reported to Truman that the translation the Thomases received while in New Delhi was a free paraphrasing of the original which included statements that were not on the scroll presented to Truman. The translation by Lama Ti-lu-wa read as follows:

\begin{quote}
To Mr. Thomas  
[From] The Foreign Minister of the Tibetan Government  
16\textsuperscript{th} day of the 7\textsuperscript{th} month [intercalary] of the year of the ox [i.e. September 8, 1949]  

Dear Mr. Thomas,  
Your letter of September 4, 1949 has been received and its contents noted.  
You are here in Tibet to learn of conditions. Tibet is a religious country and our people are composed of officials [i.e. the religious hierarchy] and of [common] people. At the same time, this is an independent country, a fact which we hope all nations of the world realize. We are greatly concerned over the struggles and sufferings now [taking place] in the whole world. Being a religious nation, both the officials and the common people of our land pray for world peace and wish the world Triratna [i.e. The Three Precious Blessings: Buddha, the Law, and the Priesthood]. We desire to convey to you the above message.

[signed] The Foreign Ministry of Tibet  
The 16\textsuperscript{th} day of the 7\textsuperscript{th} moon [i.e. September 8, 1949]  
[followed by the seal of the Foreign Ministry]\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

It is unknown who completed the translation of the scroll in New Delhi, and it can only be assumed that the Thomases had it done while in India in anticipation of arranging a meeting with President Truman shortly after their return to the US. Truman’s office accepted the

\textsuperscript{41} Ti-lu-wa was a Mongolian monk also known as Dilowa Khutuktu, who came to the U.S. to escape communist persecution. He helped found the first Tibetan-Mongolian community in the U.S. in New Jersey. For more information on this please see, Diluv Khutagt (alternate spelling of Dilowa Khutuku), Owen Lattimore, and Fujiko Isono, \textit{Memoirs and Autobiography of a Mongol Buddhist Reincarnation in Religion and Revolution} (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1982).

\textsuperscript{42} David C. Mearns, Assistant Librarian, to William D. Hassett, Secretary to the President, 2 December 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library. Mearns was apparently asked to have the scroll Lowell Thomas, Jr. presented to the President translated from Tibetan to English. The translation was done by a Mongolian Lama at Johns Hopkins University named Ti-lu-wa.

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translation performed by Lama Ti-lu-wa as the official version and not surprisingly there was some consternation among the President’s staff. When Thomas declared during his LaGuardia press conference that he was bringing a message from the Dalai Lama to President Truman, he was referring to the scroll his son gave to the President. The scroll was actually from the Foreign Ministry of Tibet, and his verbal message was from the Dalai Lama. A likely explanation is that the Tibetan government decided to have the Foreign Ministry send a written message to Truman instead of the Dalai Lama, because the Dalai Lama was not of age and would not assume full control in Tibet until he was eighteen, and the Tibetans may have thought it was more important to communicate on a government-to-government level in order to further their claim that Tibet was an independent nation.

Thomas, apparently unaware that there was any issue concerning the translation of the scroll, compounded the error by suggesting that the Newark Museum contact the President’s office requesting that the scroll be loaned to the museum for an exhibit it was preparing on Tibetan life and culture. The White House sent a curt reply stating that the museum was “in error as the President did not receive a communication from the Dalai Lama of Tibet.”

Interestingly, the report with the translation of the scroll completed by Lama Ti-lu-wa was received by Truman’s office on December 2nd and the terse response to the Newark Museum was sent out on November 17th. Either the White House knew there was a discrepancy in the

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43 Katherine Coffey, Secretary and Director of the Newark Museum, to Charlie G. Ross, Secretary to the President, 14 November 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library. The Newark Museum still holds one of the most comprehensive collections of Tibetan materials in the country.
44 William D. Hassett, Secretary to the President, to Katherine Coffey, Secretary and Director of the Newark Museum, 17 November 1949, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library.
translations in mid-November or the President did not want to acknowledge that he had received what he believed was a request for aid from Tibet.  

In spite of the episode with the scroll, Truman appeared to take the Thomases’ counsel concerning foreign policy far more seriously than he did requests from high ranking foreign dignitaries. In January of 1950, Dr. John Myun Chang (Chang Myon), the Korean Ambassador to the US, met with President Truman to request monetary and military aid for Korea. Chang hoped that the President would send Korea part of the $75,000,000 appropriated by Congress for economic assistance in the Far East. In response to this request, “the President laughed and replied that he was keeping that check locked up in his desk drawer.” The Ambassador continued the conversation by asking if the US would send military aid to Korea to defend its borders against communist encroachment. Truman suggested he discuss these matters with the State Department and then he dismissed Chang. Only a few days after his meeting with Chang, Truman approved “immediate aid to Indonesia because that country is facing a serious internal Communist threat.” The interaction between these two men was significant considering that between 1948 and 1949 Chang was the South Korean delegate to the United Nation’s General Assembly and was subsequently appointed as the first Republic of Korea Ambassador to the US.

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45 Letter from Lowell Thomas to J. R. Fuchs of the Truman Library, May 31, 1977, Miscellaneous Historical Documents Collection. MHDC#s 847-876. Box 26, MHDC 864, Truman Library. Thomas’s interest in the scroll his son delivered to Truman never waned. In 1977, at the age of eighty-five, Thomas visited the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence, Missouri. He was impressed with his experience at the library and apparently viewed some of the materials relating to his journey to Lhasa. He asked what happened to the message from the Dalai Lama to President Truman, but there is no record that the Presidential Library was ever able to locate the scroll.

46 Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, 10 January 1950, Papers of Harry S. Truman. WHCF: Confidential File. State Department Correspondence, 1950 [1 of 5] box 41, Truman Library. Dr. John Myun Chang, Korean Ambassador, met with President Truman to request economic and military aid.

47 Ibid.

48 Memorandum to the President, 09 January 1950, Papers of Harry S. Truman. WHCF: Confidential File. State Department Correspondence, 1950 [1 of 5] box 41. Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, 10 January 1950, Truman Library. The memo discussed the allocation of funds to the police constabulary of Indonesia. The funds were approved by President Truman on January 9, 1950.
However, in January of 1950 Truman appeared to take his conversations with Thomas more seriously than he did the one he’d had with the Korean Ambassador to the US. Later in 1950, Chang successfully appealed to the United States and the UN to send troops to assist in the Korean War.

The White House and the State Department agreed that as communism spread on the Asiatic mainland, it became of greater and greater importance to keep Indonesia anti-communist. The loss of Indonesia would deprive the US of an area of the highest political, strategic, and economic importance. It also demonstrates that the White House and the State Department were becoming less apprehensive about following the official stance concerning sending aid to Asian countries beyond the US’s established defensive perimeter.

Acheson’s ability to control US policy in East Asia began to wane as the first few months of 1950 slipped by. He was under attack by the Republicans, challenged by his aides and the Department of Defense, and he had to constantly consider how Truman’s hatred of the Chinese communists might influence the President’s decisions towards that part of the world. Acheson’s National Press Club speech, which he delivered on January 12th, stressed showing restraint in Asia. Avoiding a renewed conflict in Asia may have been Acheson’s primary goal during the beginning of 1950, but that would be dramatically altered by the start of the Korean War in June.

By January of 1950, Thomas had recovered sufficiently from his surgery to start traveling again, although his surgeon did tell him he would need to stay off of his leg until May. Now that

49 Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, 10 January 1950, Papers of Harry S. Truman. WHCF: Confidential File. State Department Correspondence, 1950 [1of 5] box 41, Truman Library. The memo discussed the allocation of funds to the police constabulary of Indonesia. Dean Acheson stated the importance of Indonesia to the US at the conclusion of the memo.
50 Beisner, Dean Acheson, 423-24.
Thomas was mobile again, he and Lowell, Jr. began preparing for their Tibet travelogue tour. They called their illustrated lecture “Out of This World,” which was also the title of Lowell, Jr.’s book, published later that year. Thomas also began publishing a series of magazine articles about his Tibet adventure, the first of which appeared in *Collier’s Magazine* starting in January of 1950. Both Thomases were scheduled to do a joint lecture at Constitution Hall for the National Geographic Society in Washington, DC on February 17th. Thomas invited President Truman to the show and offered to update Truman on recent news he had heard from Central Asia. Thomas surely expected Truman to make good on the promise he made to Lowell, Jr. when they met in November. The Secretary to the President politely declined Thomas’s invitation to his lecture on Truman’s behalf, but he wrote “[t]he President does want to talk with you however… I think it might be better to keep this off the record.”

Truman himself wrote that he was willing to meet with Thomas “if it would do no harm.” The two men did meet on February 17, 1950 at 12:15 p.m., but Truman was becoming more cautious in dealing with the famous newsman and world traveler. Thomas’s Tibet exploits were receiving regular national attention, but more worrisome for Truman must have been the international scrutiny Thomas’s Tibet trip was receiving.

Soviet Russia charged that Thomas was sent to Tibet by the United States government to turn it into an American colony. The *New Times*, the voice of the Kremlin, wrote that Thomas

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51 Matthew J. Connelly, President Truman’s Secretary to Lowell Thomas to 06 February 1950, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library.
52 Lowell Thomas to Matthew J. Connelly, President Truman’s secretary, 30 January 1950, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President’s Personal File. Box 594, PPF 5100, Truman Library. Truman handwrote a note at the end of Thomas’s letter noting he could not go to the lecture, but Thomas could meet with him at the White House if his press secretary thought it would not do any harm.
54 Approximately 170 newspaper articles were published in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times* concerning Thomas’s Tibet trip between October of 1949 and 1950. Many more articles were published in magazines and news stories were heard on various radio and television stations.
had been “given a very important role by the United States Government” and described his trip as a “dirty adventure.” In 1950, Russian officials continued their attacks against Thomas by broadcasting propaganda over Czechoslovakian radio. One story stated the “strategic position of Tibet and its uranium ore stimulated the Washington strategists to gain influence over Tibet. A year ago an American expedition was sent to Tibet, headed by an agent of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] – Lowell Thomas, who modestly calls himself a radio commentator.” Thomas’s public influence was certainly what captured the Kremlin’s attention and the Soviet Union must have been concerned that Thomas and his son would sway the US, and possibly other nations, to support Tibet through military or diplomatic means. Apparently Thomas’s thoughts concerning Tibet made a significant impression on Truman during their February meeting because he referred him to meet with the Secretary of State.

On February 17, 1950, Thomas met with the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, and Philip D. Sprouse, the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs. President Truman had recommended that Thomas speak with Acheson concerning two ideas he had developed while in Tibet. Hugh Richardson, the British Tibetologist who was serving as an Indian Civil Service Officer in Tibet, was still on Thomas’s mind and he recommended that Richardson be invited to speak at various American universities about his work in Tibet. Thomas had already contacted several universities suggesting that Richardson would be willing and available to lecture. Sprouse vouched for Richardson’s credibility and Acheson agreed that he could be an asset to

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56 Lowell Thomas News Radio Broadcast Transcripts, 02 February 1950, Box 430, LTP. This quote was part of the second story Thomas aired that evening.
57 Memorandum of Conversation with Lowell Thomas, United States News Commentator and Philip D. Sprouse, February 17, 1950, Acheson Papers, Secretary of State File, Truman Library.
the State Department. Thomas was impressed by Richardson when they met in Lhasa and he was determined to have him help raise American awareness to what was happening in Tibet.

The second point Thomas discussed during his meeting with Acheson had much more serious implications. Thomas talked about the strategic positioning of Tibet in relation to India and China, and the need for the US to be aware of what was happening in Central Asia. He suggested that a mission, led by the US military, be sent to Tibet for the purposes of gathering information and helping the Tibetan army establish a resistance force against any military incursion. Thomas noted that the terrain was ideal for guerilla operations and “he believed that given sufficient arms they [the Tibetan army] would be hardy fighters.” He volunteered to assist with the organization of the Tibet mission and he volunteered his son, whose recent experience in and knowledge of Tibet would be invaluable, as a member of the mission. Thomas believed that the “mission could be organized unobtrusively and ostensibly for the purpose of mountain climbing and could quietly assemble and go on over the barrier without too much attention being drawn to it.” Thomas also went to the extent of suggesting the recruitment of the Tibetan assistant to the resident Indian political officer in Sikkim as a member of the mission.

Acheson did not, as might have been expected, quickly quash the matter of sending a military mission to Tibet. He pointed out the reluctance of the Indian government to become involved in the situation brewing between China and Tibet, but he also stated that he thought Thomas’s idea had merit and that he had already been considering the idea of such an action. However, Acheson believed “that a major difficulty was that of avoiding publicity which would

58 Ibid. 59 Ibid. 60 Ibid. 61 Ibid.
draw Chinese Communist attention and probably serve to hasten their move against Tibet.”

The conversation concluded with Acheson saying that the State Department would continue to study the matter and contact Thomas if anything developed that required his assistance. Thomas was staying true to his word to the Tibetan government. He met with Truman and Acheson, and many US government officials beyond them. He presented his ideas and they were taken seriously and given due consideration; however, the White House appeared to be taking the stance that the risks in assisting Tibet out-weighed any advantages the US government might gain by establishing a presence in Tibet. In his typical unrelenting way, Thomas did not wait to see what his conversations with Acheson and Truman would yield; he kept pursuing his goal of saving Tibet.

Thomas not only sent his son to Washington to meet with US government officials, he also encouraged Ilya Tolstoy to meet with Acheson concerning his 1942 trip to Tibet in an attempt to bolster his argument that the US should send aid to the Tibetans. Tolstoy was an OSS officer and part of the envoy sent to Lhasa by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to request permission to transport supplies to China through Tibet and to create airfields during WWII. At Thomas’s urging, Tolstoy offered to meet with Acheson and give him a copy of the report he created after visiting Tibet. Thomas also sent Acheson a letter dated June 19, 1950 requesting a meeting between the Secretary of State, Lowell, Jr., Ilya Tolstoy, and himself. The meeting was in part a mission of mercy because Thomas wanted to receive permission from Acheson to send a shipment of Cortisone to Reggie Fox in Lhasa. Fox suffered from severe arthritis and while the Thomases were in Tibet, Fox heard a news story about a new wonder drug that was about to be released. Thomas and Lowell, Jr. promised they would do everything they could to arrange for a

62 Ibid.
batch of Cortisone to be shipped to Fox in Lhasa. Thomas met with Dr. James M. Carlisle, one of the scientists that developed Cortisone, and George Merck, who was the President of the drug company Merck & Co. to arrange for a batch of the new drug to be prepared for Fox. Of course, the main item on Thomas’s agenda was to continue the conversation he had with Acheson in the fall of 1949.

Thomas was certainly sincere in his desire to help Fox, but he may have been using this as part of his strategy to establish greater influence with the State Department. He wanted to have Tolstoy at the meeting as a former OSS officer and Army colonel to affirm Thomas’s suggestion that a US military mission be sent to Tibet. Thomas pointed out that all of the maps and other information Tolstoy gathered in 1942 were available in the State Department. Thomas also reminded Acheson about the conversation they had had concerning having Hugh Richardson speak at American universities regarding his time in Tibet. Thomas also suggested that Max Thornburg would be able to offer valuable advice concerning Tibet’s situation with communist China. Although Thomas noted that the objective of the mission to Tibet would be to bring medical supplies to Fox “the members of the party of course would want to do anything they can that you and your colleagues might suggest.”

He went on to write, “Colonel Tolstoy, the only American who knows the terrain between Lhasa and Sinkiang, believes that a small force could hold up any Chinese Red invasion. And, surely it would be better to have the Red armies on the northern side of Tibet rather than along the thirteen hundred mile Tibetan-Indian frontier, where it would be impossible for the Indians to keep them from infiltrating.”

Thomas also stressed

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64 Ibid. Thomas had a cordial relationship with Ilya Tolstoy. There is some correspondence from Tolstoy to Thomas in the Lowell Thomas Papers showing the two men knew each other, but it is unclear how they met. They were both world travelers and had an interest in helping Tibet, which may have been the extent of their relationship.
how this mission “would be made without benefit of publicity.” He wrote that Lowell, Jr. would be more than willing to go. Thomas noted that as much as he would like to return to Tibet, this time he would send his son on his own. Thomas was pushing his agenda with the State Department hard. Acheson’s office declined to schedule a meeting with Tolstoy; the Secretary of State’s schedule was too busy. However, Thomas still managed to ship the Cortisone to Reggie Fox.

Reggie Fox and Hugh Richardson both wanted to know what, if anything, the US was prepared to do for Tibet. The Thomases’ replies were cautious, not wanting to get Fox’s and Richardson’s hopes up, especially since they had not received any commitment for aid from Truman or Acheson. Lowell, Jr. broached the idea of arranging for a second trip to Tibet, with the purpose of gathering factual material to help the White House decide if it would send “any real assistance to Tibet.” Lowell, Jr. indicated that during his conversations with US government officials, he was led to believe another trip to Tibet would be advantageous and any government representative would come to Tibet as a civilian traveler. The request for a return trip to Lhasa was also made to Tsepon Shakabpa and to other Tibetan dignitaries by Lowell, Jr. Max Thornburg was revealed as the government representative that would travel incognito, and it was hoped that additional motion picture film could be shot to improve the Thomases’

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid. Thomas wrote a four-page letter to Acheson detailing his plan to get a mission into Tibet under the auspices of a medical mission.
67 Memorandum of conversation with Ilya Tolstoy, 19 June 1950, Acheson Papers. Secretary of State File, Alphabetical File, 1945-1972, Box 44, File 44-3, Truman Library. The memo noted that the Secretary of State’s schedule was busy and his office would get back to him. There was no follow up correspondence with Tolstoy.
68 Charles H. Derry to Lowell Thomas, Jr., 03 October 1950, Box 468, Folder 25, LTP. Derry confirmed that Reggie Fox received the shipment of Cortisone in “perfect condition”.
69 Letter from Lowell Thomas, Jr. to Reggie Fox, 19 April 1950, Box 468, Folder 25, LTP.
travelogue.\textsuperscript{70} Lowell, Jr. would have to wait until July to receive a response to his proposal for a return trip to Tibet.

During the spring of 1950, things appeared to fall apart for Thomas and his son regarding their goal to bring US aid to Tibet. Suddenly Thomas’s correspondence with Washington was met with polite, but generic responses, and all the work he had done trying to influence policy in DC stalled. Attacks by McCarthy and other Republicans continued to be a distraction to Acheson and were likely impediments to Thomas’s labors to keep Acheson focused on his appeals to assist Tibet. Dean Rusk also appears to have been part of the mix. Rusk began his career in the State Department in 1945 and would later become the second longest serving US Secretary of State under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. In March of 1950, however, Rusk had just been appointed the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. He replaced William Walton Butterworth, who held the post for less than a year. Butterworth was known for his Asian-American foreign relations work, particularly during the developing confrontations between the Communists and Nationalists in post-war China. Acheson removed Butterworth in the hopes of stopping the attacks he was receiving from McCarthy and the China Lobby over his China policy.\textsuperscript{71} Rusk had the support of the Republicans in the House and the Senate, and his policies concerning Asia were radically different from Butterworth’s. Butterworth believed the key to gaining support in Asia was recognizing nationalism. Rusk believed that military action was necessary to fight the global communist conspiracy that was being guided from Moscow.\textsuperscript{72}

McCarthyism caused many shifts to the right in American foreign policy, and in this instance it

\textsuperscript{70} Lowell Thomas, Jr. to Your “Excellencies,” 10 May 1950, Box 469, Folder 9, LTP. Follow-up correspondence with Tibetan dignitaries.

\textsuperscript{71} Laird, Into Tibet, 155.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 155.
occurred at the exact time when Thomas was making some headway with his goal of bringing US aid to Tibet.

Rusk was willing to meet with Thomas, but the enthusiasm Thomas had previously received from the State Department was absent. Thomas must have sensed this, because he resorted to cajolery. He invited Rusk to his Quaker Hill home for a weekend visit via a telegram. He wrote, “Even those of you who carry our heaviest responsibilities should have the time for relaxation during the summer.” Thomas wanted to continue the conversation he had started with Acheson about sending a US mission to Tibet. There must have been resistance from Rusk, because Thomas assured him by writing, “Please do not feel that it would mean any high pressure. Our [Thomas’s and his son’s] personal arguments in favor of undertaking this mission [to Tibet] are offset by arguments in opposite direction.” Rusk sent a very brief note declining Thomas’s invitation, but he did agree to meet with him in New York City. What Thomas did not know was that the State Department and CIA were about to put a plan into action for Tibet.

As a diplomat, Dean Rusk typically sought international support for his public plans, but not for his internal stratagems. As a member of the State Department, Rusk was another challenge for Acheson. Always more aggressive on issues concerning Asia, particularly China, Rusk had a knack for treading on the good will Acheson was trying to develop with the American public. Rusk launched a scathing attack on the communist regime in a speech he presented at the China Institute of New York on May 18, 1951. He called Mao Zedong’s government a “colonial Russian government,” a “Slavic Manchukuo” that failed even the “first

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74 Ibid.
test” of being “Chinese.” The New York Times accused Rusk of trying to start an internal revolt against the CCP and his comments offended US allies to such an extent that the British Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison, filed an official complaint against Rusk. Acheson did his best to smooth things over with the general public, but Rusk was unapologetic and claimed he did not say anything that was not consistent with current US policy.

Rusk’s appointment as the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs came just three months before North Korean communists crossed the 38th parallel provoking the Korean War and he played an influential role in all the decisions of the war, including the American armed response, the involvement of the United Nations Security Council, the protection of Taiwan by the Seventh Fleet, and the recall of MacArthur. What happened behind the scenes in matters concerning Asia was a very different story. Thomas was able to establish a dialogue with Truman and Acheson concerning the possibility of sending a US military mission to Tibet, but Rusk appeared to be shutting Thomas down. Acheson indicated to Thomas that the State Department was considering this course of action when they met in the fall of 1949. The fact that the State Department was considering this action flew in the face of the US government’s official hand-offs policy concerning China as stated in the China White Paper Acheson’s National Press Club speech defining the “defensive perimeter” in the Pacific as a line running through Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines. Acheson’s admission was surprising, especially considering it was made to a private citizen with a popular radio news program, but it was something he obviously did not want repeated publicly. What Acheson did not tell

75 Beisner, Dean Acheson, 496.
76 Ibid.
77 Matray, “Dean Acheson's Press Club Speech.”
78 The memorandum in which Acheson stated that the State Department was considering a US mission to Tibet and most of Thomas’s correspondence with the State Department was classified as “Secret.”
Thomas was that the State Department and CIA had already set activities in motion in Asia that had begun almost as the Thomases set foot in Tibet.

A covert mission to Tibet was put into action and Douglas Mackiernan was appointed as the leader of the group of men that was to go to Lhasa. Mackiernan was a CIA covert intelligence officer who was charged with gathering atomic intelligence concerning the Soviet Union’s first atomic bomb. He was officially assigned a post as a Vice-Consul for the US State Department at the US consulate in Urumqi, in the Xinjiang Province of China as a cover for his espionage work. On July 29, 1949, after the communists had all but defeated the nationalists in China, US Secretary of State Acheson ordered the US consulate in Urumqi to be closed. Mackiernan stayed behind to destroy consular records and equipment, and to carry on his work observing atomic activity. In early August, he communicated with the State Department by coded message confirming he was still monitoring developments in the Soviet Union, but on August 29th his work was finished when the Soviets conducted their first successful atomic test in Kazakhstan.

Leading a party of five men, Mackiernan left China in late September, with a new mission. He and his men departed Urumqi just ahead of Mao Zedong’s troops. They then embarked on a difficult journey crossing more than 1,000 miles of the Taklamakan Desert by camel and on horseback. Their goal was the Himalayan Mountains and the Tibetan border where they were to make a covert attempt to aid Tibet and stave off the communists, by arming the Tibetans and recognizing Tibet’s independence. On April 29, 1950 Mackiernan’s party

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79 Coded communication from Mackiernan to Acheson indicating that Mackiernan was still monitoring Soviet atomic testing activity on 10 August 1949, National Archives, document NARA RG 59, 125.937 D/8-1049.
reached a Tibetan outpost. The CIA operative and two of his men approached the Tibetan guards, anticipating that appropriate permissions had been granted to allow them to travel to Lhasa. However, as they approached the border the Tibetan guards opened fire killing Mackiernan and two of his colleagues. The Tibetans only realized that a tragic mistake had occurred when couriers from Lhasa arrived five days later carrying a message from the Dalai Lama granting safe conduct for Mackiernan’s party. The US government had delayed sending its message to Lhasa to arrange for permission for Mackiernan to meet with the Dalai Lama for so long that there was no possibility that the Tibetan government would have been able to respond in time to inform its border guards.81 The surviving members of the party traveled to Lhasa to meet with Tibetan officials to encourage them to officially request covert US military aid. In late-July of 1950, Tibet’s encrypted message requesting US military aid was received by Dean Rusk in the US State Department.82 Within a few weeks the CIA began air dropping small quantities of weapons into Tibet.83 Spies working for the communist Chinese government became aware of the US mission to Tibet. This action by the US may have been one of the reasons why the People’s Republic of China invaded Tibet in October of 1950. When questioned, the US government denied any involvement with Tibet and claimed it was communist propaganda and Tibet also denied any involvement in an attempt to dissuade China from believing that the Tibetans were working with an enemy of the PRC.84 The US government certainly did keep much of their involvement with Tibet during this time period quiet. It was only in 2008 that the CIA publicly recognized Mackiernan’s work as a field

detailed Mackiernan’s work as a CIA intelligence operative and his attempt to aid Tibet in 1950. Frank Bessac, who was with Mackiernan when he was killed, also chronicled the US mission to Tibet.81 Jiu-Hwa Lo Upshur, “The Great Game and Tibet,” Michigan War Studies Review, May 2011, 6-7. 82 Laird, Into Tibet, 235-36. 83 Ibid., 246-47. 84 Laird, Into Tibet, 247; Lezlee Brown Halper and Stefan Halper in Tibet: An Unfinished Story (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87. Both sources also indicated that communist China was observing US interactions with Tibet.
Of course, like with many histories the entire story may never be fully understood, but why China invaded when it did had multiple factors. Western governments feared that the support of any foreign government, including the US government, would endanger Tibet, and officials in Washington, Britain, and India argued that it would provoke the People’s Republic of China to invade Tibet. Another theory points to a “fragmented” Tibet being a reason for the Chinese invasion. Some Tibetans wanted to be liberated and were willing to lend their support to China. One, or possibly all of the reasons, ultimately led the People’s Republic of China to invade Tibet in October of 1950.

Thomas, like the rest of America, was unaware of the drama that was unfolding between Tibet and the US State Department, so he and his son continued to keep officials in Washington apprised of their activities. Thomas realized that his direct line to the State Department as an unofficial advisor had been severed, but it did not stop him from sending updates concerning his and Lowell, Jr.’s activities to promote Tibet to their American audiences. Shortly after its publication in 1950, Lowell, Jr. sent Acheson a copy of his book Out of This World, and Acheson responded with a note of appreciation telling Lowell, Jr. that “I shall prize this volume very highly.” Then, just as suddenly as Thomas’s Washington connections seemed to dry up, his Tibetan intelligence became highly sought after by various governmental and military

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86 Sulmaan Wasif Khan, Muslim, Trader, Nomad, Spy: China’s Cold War and the People of the Tibetan Borderlands (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 20.

87 Dean Acheson to Lowell Thomas, Jr. 5 January 1951, Acheson Papers. Secretary of State File, Alphabetical File, 1945-1972, Box 44, File 44-3, Truman Library. Acheson thanked Lowell, Jr. warmly for sending him an inscribed copy of Out of This World.
agencies. Apparently the start of the Korean War at the end of June renewed the State Department’s and Rusk’s interests in what the Thomases had to offer.

Thomas and his son had maintained their contacts in Tibet as well as in Washington. Lowell, Jr. wrote to Tibetan dignitaries in Lhasa to update them on the conversations he and his father had had with US government officials concerning bringing aid to Tibet. He described his meeting with President Truman in early November of 1949, during which he told the President about the threat to Tibet’s independence and explained the Tibetans’ urgent need for assistance. Truman asked many questions about Tibet and expressed his concern for what was happening in Asia. Lowell, Jr. wrote:

The President told me that it was his hope to organize the moral forces of the world against the immoral, and that he had communicated with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, regarding this. The President realizes the tremendous benevolent moral power of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and of Buddhism.88

Truman’s interest in Buddhism was genuine. His and Eisenhower’s administrations both defined the Cold War as a religious conflict, pitting the religious values of a Judeo-Christian worldview and American democracy against the totalitarian-atheist threat of communism.89 Truman personally believed that “the Buddhists have a moral code that is excellent,”90 which is a major reason why he and Eisenhower took steps to work through Buddhist channels to undermine communism in East Asia.91 However, the President’s view of religion did little to encourage the Tibetans.

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88 Lowell Thomas, Jr. to Your “Excellencies,” 10 May 1950, Box 469, Folder 9, LTP. Follow-up correspondence with Tibetan dignitaries.
91 Inboden, Religion and American Foreign Policy, 305.
The rest of Lowell, Jr.’s letter was no more reassuring. The response he received from the President when he asked during their November meeting if the US would supply the Tibetan army with modern weapons and military advisors was noncommittal. Truman was sympathetic to Tibet’s problems, but he did not know how to lend “Tibet support without precipitating a full-scale Communist movement in your direction.”\(^9^2\) Lowell, Jr. demonstrated to the Tibetans that he and his father were able to communicate directly with the highest official in the US government, but he also confirmed that the US was not planning to send any significant aid to Tibet. Truman basically told the Tibetan government that he was not committing arms to Tibet for Tibet’s own good. However, he was also saying the US was not abandoning Tibet. Indeed, by not committing foreign support, Truman was avoiding an action that might lead to an immediate and devastating invasion of Tibet.\(^9^3\) It did not matter that there was some truth in Truman’s response; it was demoralizing news for the Tibetans.

The Tibetan government expressed its frustration with Western countries generally in a letter Lowell, Jr. received from Reggie Fox:

The Tibetan officials are puzzled and confused at the attitude of the western countries who in the news broadcasts and other ways continually denounce communism and promise help to all non-communist countries—yet these same broadcasts, etc., never even mention the name Tibet—they even seem to avoid it, as if under strict orders to do so. This action by America, Britain, and others is driving this government to make terms with the communists.

p.s. If American said ‘Hands off Tibet!’ it would be sufficient I think, because they [the Chinese] do not want to be accused as agressors [sic] at this moment!\(^9^4\)

Lowell, Jr. passed the letter along to his father, and at some point Thomas discussed the contents of the letter with Dean Rusk. Rusk responded by saying that “we can’t say ‘hands off Tibet’

\(^9^2\) Letter from Lowell Thomas, Jr. to Your “Excellencies,” 10 May 1950, Box 469, Folder 9.
\(^9^3\) Bayer, “From Out of This World to the Cold War,” 60.
\(^9^4\) Reggie Fox to Lowell Thomas, Jr., 11 June 1950, Box 468, Folder 25, LTP.
unless we are prepared to see that hands are kept off: and apparently the US cannot take on the defense of Tibet at this moment. 95

The content of Fox’s letter apparently grabbed Rusk’s attention. He thanked Thomas for sending him a copy and wrote: “We have found the letter from Mr. Fox extremely informative and useful as first-hand information on that area. We would be glad to have any further background material of this character which you may receive.” 96 At this point in his experience with Thomas, Rusk may have realized that the radio newsman would be able to provide the State Department with a unique source of information concerning Tibet. Fox’s letter was also passed along to Kermit Roosevelt, Jr., a senior CIA officer and grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt wrote the following to Thomas:

Thank you very much for sending me copies of the letters you received from Lhasa. The one from Reg Fox is not only interesting but quite valuable not only to us but, judging from the comments I have heard, to the Department of State. Access to material of this nature aids us immeasurably in our present rather difficult tasks.

I am indeed sorry that you could not have had more time to spend with us and hope this may be remedied in the not too distant future. 97

Roosevelt realized that Thomas could also provide valuable information to the CIA and he apparently intended to bring Thomas to Langley to provide further information concerning his Tibet experience. The Thomases were now directly involved in Tibet-US diplomacy and their expertise in this area would continue to be requested by US government officials throughout the early stages of the Korean War.

95 Ibid. Lowell Thomas, Sr. wrote a note on a copy of Reggie Fox’s letter commenting on Dean Rusk’s response to the contents of the correspondence.
96 Dean Rusk to Lowell Thomas, 19 July 1950, Box 468, Folder 44, LTP. Rusk’s letter was brief but cordial.
97 Kermit Roosevelt to Lowell Thomas, 21 July 1950, Box 468, Folder 43, LTP.
Thomas, never shy of seizing an opportunity, wrote to Rusk reminding him of Lowell, Jr.’s plan to return to Tibet as part of a government mission to gather information in the region. Thomas asked Rusk’s advice concerning getting final approval from the Tibetan government to enter Tibet; a month had passed since the Thomases’ last communication with Lhasa. They had already shipped their equipment and supplies for the expedition to Calcutta, and Lowell, Jr. was prepared to leave at a moment’s notice. Thomas also added that the trip would be secret and he did not intend to use any material Lowell, Jr. gathered “over the air.” Thomas appeared to want to reassure Rusk that he was more concerned about the success of the mission than his personal desire to improve his travelogue. In the end, the Tibetan government dismissed the idea of another visit led by Lowell, Jr. or any other American. Fox explained, in a long awaited letter, that having not received any support from the US, the Dalai Lama was advised that the Tibetan government should avoid establishing a connection with the United States in order to develop better relations with China.

Intriguingly, Thomas asked in his letter if it would be possible for Rusk to share “the details of the recent China-Tibetan border incident, who were killed, and the others in the party who needed rescue…” with Lowell, Jr. and Dr. Charles Houston (who was another member of the proposed Tibet mission). Is it possible that the State Department told Thomas about Mackiernan’s failed CIA mission to Lhasa? If so, it would have shown extraordinary trust in a civilian with a radio news show, especially considering the details of Mackiernan’s death would only be publicly known decades later. If it was another incident on the China-Tibet border, it

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98 Lowell Thomas to Dean Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State, 03 July 1950, Box 468, Folder 44, LTP.
99 Letter from Reggie Fox to Lowell Thomas, Jr., 07 July 1950, Box 468, Folder 2, LTP. The Dalai Lama’s monk advisors were against another visit from US representatives since Lhasa had not received any aid, and it was believed a second visit might prevent Tibet from negotiating the best possible terms with the Chinese government.
100 Lowell Thomas to Dean Rusk, 03 July 1950, Box 468, Folder 44, LTP.
was still obviously classified knowledge based on the way Thomas phrased his request to Rusk, which still indicates a new found level of trust between the two men.

Immediately following the North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950, the US increased its national security emphasis on Asia, and the CIA was “instructed to initiate psychological warfare and paramilitary operations against Communist China; this order would affect Tibet in due course.”¹⁰¹ This initiative spelled doom for Tibet; no significant support would come from the US before it was too late. In August of 1950, US and British authorities were discussing what appeared to be the impending invasion of Tibet. During the US Mutual Defense Aid Program Southeast Asia Survey Mission, US Ambassador John F. Melby and the United Kingdom civil and military representatives in Malaya discussed reports that 800,000 PRC troops were massing on the border of Tibet and that Lhasa was expected to fall in November.¹⁰² However, it was in October of 1950 that communist China invaded Tibet, but Mao only announced this to the world weeks after the fact. As the year ended, it was clear to Truman’s advisors that nothing could reverse the occupation of this small and remote region, yet it was recognized that Tibet could potentially serve as a pressure point against the spread of communism. Programs to train Tibetans to conduct intelligence collection and guerilla operations were put in place by the CIA by the end of Truman’s presidency.¹⁰³ Former deputy director of the CIA, Ray S. Cline, succinctly summed up the hazards of covert action, stating that the “weak point in covert paramilitary action is that a single misfortune that reveals the C.I.A.’s connection makes it necessary for the United States either to abandon the cause completely or

¹⁰¹ Daugherty, Executive Secrets, 128.
¹⁰³ Daugherty, Executive Secrets, 128.
convert it to a policy of overt military intervention.” At this point, the US government appeared to give up on the idea of open military involvement in Tibet. Instead the CIA and State Department began a policy that became typical of the Cold War; they relied on attempts to thwart and harass the communists’ expansionary program and Tibet became one of its pawns. The US started secretly supplying arms to Tibet in late 1950, while Acheson also filed protests with the United Nations against Chinese actions in Tibet. While some of Acheson’s critics disagreed with his protests, he was far more concerned about American public opinion, and unabashedly lobbied for the resolution’s passage to denounce China’s activities in Tibet with the UN. Thomas was also concerned about American public opinion, but only in how he could sway it in favor of supporting Tibet. Matters would only become more complicated for Tibet in the coming months.

After the PLA invaded Tibet in the fall of 1950, the Indian government was divided over what policy to follow concerning China. One camp viewed China as a potential and major future enemy and wanted to continue the British Tibetan policy: turn Tibet into an independent state or a buffer state for India. The second camp was led by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. He wanted to pursue friendly relations with the PRC. Nehru believed that both countries had suffered greatly during the colonial era and it was time to cooperate and start a new age in Asia. He stated to the Indian parliament that India should recognize China’s suzerainty of Tibet because Washington and London did not publicly raise any questions about Tibet being a province of China following the establishment of Mao’s government. However, he also

\[\text{104} \text{ Ibid., 143.}\]
\[\text{105} \text{ Beisner, } \text{Dean Acheson}, 423-24.\]
\[\text{106} \text{ Ibid., 423-24.}\]
\[\text{107} \text{ Simei Qing, } \text{From Allies to Enemies: Visions of Modernity, Identity, and U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1945-1960} \text{ (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 272.}\]
stressed that the PRC should respect Tibet’s autonomy and it should not force Tibetans to accept the reform programs that were mandatory in other provinces.

A few months after North Korea invaded South Korea, the Thomases were giving secret talks to various US government agencies, including the US Air Force and the Department of Defense, concerning various aspects of Tibet’s geography, the Tibetan people, the Tibetan government’s stance on communism, and how Tibetan leadership would react to a possible US or UN intervention. Washington and US Air Force top brass had a renewed interest in what the Thomases could share with them concerning Tibet.

Captain Charles H. Cooke, from the US Air Force Directorate of Intelligence Headquarters, was particularly impressed with the information and materials Thomas had to offer. He requested to borrow some of Thomas’s “magnificent” Tibet photos for official US Air Force use. Cooke went on to explain:

The use proposed for this material is for the top-level intelligence publication of the Air Force (classified Secret). This publication is distributed only to a “closed-circuit” readership of interested military, State Department, and other organizations. This may make it possible for you to speak more freely on some phases of Tibet than would otherwise be the case. I shall bring a list of specific questions and will of course be most happy to record any comments of any kind that you wish to make on this subject.

… Pictures of level areas (possible airfield sites) would especially interest us… Also any pictures showing terrain, or other factors, with a bearing on possible air operations, etc.

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108 Bayer, “From Out of This World to the Cold War,” 61.
109 The Air Force officials included: Brigadier General E. Moore; General Hoyt Vandenberg, Chief of Staff of the US Air Force; General Nathan Farragut Twining, a future Chief of Staff and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Secretary of the Air Force, Thomas K. Finletter; and General George Stratemeyer, the commanding general of the Far East Air Forces, which he led through the first year of the Korean War.
110 USAF Captain Charles H. Cooke to Lowell Thomas, 31 October 1950, Box 468, Folder 18, LTP. The letter begins with Cooke’s official request and ends with a personal note stating how sorry Cooke’s wife was not to “see everybody again.” The charming Lowell Thomas apparently added an Air Force Captain to his list of friends.
Cooke was not the only Air Force officer to be impressed by Thomas. Brigadier General E. Moore personally commended Thomas on the information he presented concerning Tibet while he was in Washington. “Not only was your information itself excellent, but the impact of your views, your ideas of the significance of the area, and what can be done about it made a deep impression on all who heard you.” Moore went on to note that he intended to attend Lowell, Jr.’s Tibet lecture at Constitution Hall in December, and that if “there is anything we can do in his interest while he is here, please pass the word to him that he is to be sure and get in touch with me.”

Thomas was presenting his Tibet materials to various government agencies and participating in classified briefings throughout the fall of 1950. He kept an outline for a “Proposed Talk on Tibet” and “Proposed Questions to be Propounded to Mr. Lowell Thomas Relative to Tibet.” The questions were written in military terms and were often technical in nature, requiring a knowledge of field maneuvers and aviation, both of which Thomas had from his experiences in WWI and WWII. The goal of the questions was to gain strategic knowledge of the conditions and terrain of the region. The following questions indicate the level of knowledge the military now presumed Thomas to have: “What areas of Tibet are adapted to conventional military operations?; What areas are not… but are suitable for guerrilla warfare?; What are the approaches to Tibet which can be used by military forces?; Are there areas in Tibet suitable for air-fields?”

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111 USAF Brigadier General E. Moore to Lowell Thomas, 17 November 1950, Box 468, Folder 18, LTP.
112 USAF Captain Charles H. Cooke to Lowell Thomas, 27 November 1950, Box 468, Folder 18, LTP. Cooke sent Thomas a recording of a talk he gave at the Pentagon on November 15th, and he noted, “The recordings of the earlier briefings had to be erased, owing to their classification levels.”
113 “Proposed Talk on Tibet” outline, 02 November 1950, Box 468, Folder 18, LTP. Thomas’s outline was stamped “confidential” and it was also marked with various government codes.
114 “Proposed Questions to be Propounded to Mr. Lowell Thomas Relative to Tibet,” Tibet-Correspondence-Department of the Air Force, Box 468, Folder 18, LTP.
constructed in Lhasa that could handle C-47 aircraft, what materials were available for runway construction, what was the nearest fuel source, and what communications systems were present in the area? Thomas even condensed his talks into an article entitled “Why do the Reds want Tibet?,” which appeared in *Air Intelligence Digest*. In this article Thomas discusses his theory concerning the importance of Tibet to halting the spread of communism through the rest of Southeast Asia, including Pakistan and India. He also believed that Tibet was critical to the ongoing Korean conflict, stating that China might view taking Tibet as a way to regain “face” lost in the Korean War. Thomas was now viewed by the US government as an expert in all things Tibet, but his *Air Intelligence Digest* article, coming after Tibet was invaded by China, indicates that he realized the renewed interest in the information he was providing would be used for military operations for the Korean War and that it would do little to help Tibet.

In November of 1950, Thomas was still acting as an advisor to Washington concerning Tibet and it is interesting to note that he was not the only private individual offering President Truman advice concerning Southeast Asia. Dr. Eliot G. Mears, a professor of geography and international trade in the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University, had identified two “easy routes into Tibet across [the] Himalayas.” Mears had prepared these facts for publication, but died before they could go to press. His research assistant Dr. Lalla R. Boone decided to bring this information to the attention of Truman. President Truman declined to meet

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116 Ibid., 7.
with Dr. Boone, but he did refer the matter to the Department of Defense.\textsuperscript{118} Tibet was already gaining at least some notoriety with a wider American audience.

In spite of the demand for Thomas’s knowledge of Tibet by the US government, he was still trying to convince Washington to bring Hugh Richardson to the US. Thomas had remained in contact with Richardson with the hope that he would still be able to lecture at various American universities concerning his distinguished career as an Anglo-Indian Civil Service Officer, British diplomat, and particularly as a Tibetologist. Richardson, although willing to help, expressed reservations about doing Thomas’s proposed lecture tour. He doubted that the US government “would care to give more fuel to the allegations of Anglo-U.S. intrigue by importing me.”\textsuperscript{119} He was also concerned that the government of India would not want him to publicly support Tibet. Richardson believed he could do the most good for Tibet from “behind the scenes,” and he had hopes that he would be invited to join the United Kingdom delegation.\textsuperscript{120} Thomas disagreed with Richardson’s assessment of the situation and reaffirmed his belief to Acheson that Richardson should be encouraged to visit the US for the purposes of presenting lectures on Tibet. Thomas stated, “His [Richardson’s] words ‘Anglo-U.S. intrigue’ were not well chosen. After all, he has the knowledge. We need it, and there is no flavor of intrigue about that. Even if there was, it would be more than justified under the circumstances.”\textsuperscript{121} In his characteristically persistent style, Thomas continued to try to push his agenda but he had changed tactics. Realizing direct support for Tibet from the US government was out of the


\textsuperscript{119} Lowell Thomas to Dean Acheson, 05 December 1950, Acheson Papers. Secretary of State File, Alphabetical File, 1945-1972, Box 44, File 44-3, Truman Library. Thomas transcribed portions of a letter he received from Hugh Richardson in his letter to Acheson.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid. Richardson was apparently not entirely happy about his retirement and seemed eager to continue his work in Central Asia in some fashion.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid. Thomas noted in the post-script of his letter that his son would be sending Acheson a copy of his book \textit{Out of This World} to his home address.
question, he now was pushing the State Department to help raise the American public’s awareness to what was happening in Tibet. Thomas’s new strategy initially appeared to be meeting with success in the US Department of Defense.

In a behind-the-scenes dispute, Thomas Eliot Wiel and Francis E. Meloy, two members of the State Department, disagreed about the advantageousness of Acheson supporting an invitation to Richardson for a US lecture tour. In November and December of 1950, Thomas reminded Acheson of the positive conversation they had concerning this issue the previous year and Acheson passed along Thomases request to his staff. Wiel was an enthusiastic supporter of Thomas’s plan, perhaps because of the extensive experience he had in South Asia. He met with Tsepon Shakabpa and the members of the Tibetan Trade Mission in 1948 and he served as the Second Secretary of Embassy in India and Consul at New Delhi.  

Weil said “it would be highly desirable to bring Hugh Richardson to Washington to talk with people in the Pentagon, in the [State] Department and in other agencies.” He was apparently convinced that Richardson would be invited to the US and only suggested that his office ascertain if the Pentagon had already made arrangements for Richardson’s “transportation and other expenses” before executing Thomas’s plan. Weil had received what he considered to be valuable information concerning Tibet from Richardson during the trade mission and he believed his knowledge of the area to be extensive and unique. He also believed that the State Department should have taken greater advantage of Richardson’s knowledge during the 1948 mission.

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123 Memo from Thomas Weil to Francis Meloy, 17 November 1950, Acheson Papers. Secretary of State File, Alphabetical File, 1945-1972, Box 44, File 44-3, Truman Library. The preceding quote was also from this document.
Weil expanded on his discourse concerning Tibet and chastised the Pentagon for not showing a greater interest in the region sooner. He stressed the “ideological and geographic” importance of Tibet to winning any future wars in Asia. Tibet had yet to be influenced by communism and the deeply religious nature of its people would likely keep them from succumbing to the Soviet imperialist threat.\textsuperscript{124} Weil was convinced that friendly relations with Tibet could mean the difference between success and failure if world events led to the US participating in another military incursion in Asia. Tibet could become an inestimable military resource for the US. Weil concluded by quoting a portion of a dispatch he wrote in 1947:

While it is to be hoped that the necessity of sending United States military forces to the Asiatic mainland will never recur, the present unsettled state of affairs in Asia makes it impossible to avoid the conclusion that such operations might again be forced upon our Government; and while it is also to be hoped that friendly relations will be maintained with such governments as may eventually gain control of India, Burma, Indochina, and China during the next few years we cannot ignore the possibility that any or all of these governments might adopt an unfriendly attitude toward the United States, or that a state of anarchy might develop in the countries in question, or that an unfriendly power might gain control of these areas.\textsuperscript{125}

The two camps that had developed in the State Department were still active. Weil belonged to the camp that agreed with Thomas’s assessment that Tibet was a strategic resource for the U.S., and Francis Meloy belonged to the camp that believed the dangers of becoming involved with Tibet far out-weighed any advantages Tibet might bring to the US. Weil’s detailed memo to Meloy, who was a State Department colleague who had far less experience in

\textsuperscript{124} Memo from Thomas Weil to Francis Meloy, 17 November 1950, Acheson Papers. Secretary of State File, Alphabetical File, 1945-1972, Box 44, File 44-3, Truman Library. Weil quoted lengthy passages from past dispatches in his memo to demonstrate that he believed Tibet to be an important strategic resource for the US in Asia.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
Asia than Weil, fell on deaf ears. Meloy told his staff to merely acknowledge Thomas’s request to bring Richardson to the US and say that it will be sent to the appropriate offices. When asked, “Shouldn’t we check with NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] rather than ignoring the content of the letter…?” Meloy responded, “No. We’re not eager to get Richardson to come here, which L. Thomas wants us to arrange.” Ultimately, Thomas received a letter from Acheson, who gave Thomas vague assurances that he would make inquiries about arranging for Richardson to talk with people in Washington and that Thomas’s letter and its enclosures would be sent to State Department officers who were directly responsible for “affairs in that area.” Of course, Thomas’s correspondence fell to Weil and Meloy, and apparently Meloy had the greater influence of the two. There is no evidence that Richardson ever came to the US to speak with any US government officials in Washington or that he lectured at American universities concerning his career in Tibet. By August of 1951, Truman considered Tibet to be an area under communist control, and by this point Thomas realized, in spite of all he had done in Washington, that if he were going to do anything significant for Tibetans it would be through swaying American public opinion to support Tibet.

The relationship between Tibet and the United States during the late 1940s and early 1950s was convoluted, but significant to understanding the modern history of Tibet. Thomas

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126 US Department of State, Office of the Historian, “Francis Edward Meloy, Jr. (1917-1976)”, accessed April 30, 2015, http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/meloy-francis-edward. Meloy had far more Foreign Service experience in Central American and the Caribbean than Asia. It wasn’t until he became the US Ambassador the Lebanon in 1976 that he held a significant post in Asia. He was only in office for a few months before he was assassinated.
127 Handwritten note attached to Weil’s memo that was initialed by Francis Meloy, Acheson Papers. Secretary of State File, Alphabetical File, 1945-1972, Box 44, File 44-3, Truman Library.
128 Ibid.
became inextricably intertwined between the US and Tibetan governments from the summer of 1949 through the end of 1951. After tenaciously pursuing some of the highest officials in the US government and military, he became a valued advisor concerning Tibet to the White House, the State Department, the Air Force, and other governmental and military agencies. From Washington, DC to Langley, Virginia there was serious consideration and effort to send aid to Tibet, but ultimately the White House decided the risks in assisting Tibet out-weighed any advantages the US government might gain by establishing a presence in Tibet. The cold warriors of the West had found another pawn to use in their efforts to thwart and harass the communist expansionary program in the East.

Thomas was the best known celebrity of the day to visit Tibet, speak with its leaders, and bring the Tibetan issue to the US government and the American people. The enthusiasm shown by the most politically connected newsman in the US appeared to encourage the White House, State Department, the CIA, and the Air Force to attempt to further the interests of the US in Tibet. Thomas shared many of the same opinions about Tibet’s political importance to the US at the time, specifically that it would be advantageous to have an influence in the region to undermine communism. In the summer and fall of 1949, Thomas became a self-appointed diplomat between Tibet and the US. He began a dialogue between the two governments and initially US support of Tibet did not appear to be out of the realm of possibility. However, amidst failed US efforts to support Tibet and the growing turbulence in Asia, the balance tipped and Thomas suddenly became much more useful as a source of information to the cold warriors in Washington. He did not sway the US government to support Tibet, but he did provide valuable strategic information to US governmental and military agencies during the early stages of the Korean War. In the end, Thomas became a cold warrior himself, but he was always
treading on the fringes of this role. He would have far greater success, and a far more public role, in his efforts to raise the consciousness of the American public to the plight of Tibetans.
CHAPTER SIX

Stirring American Consciousness:
The Glorification of Tibet, 1950-1971

During the summer of 1949, Lowell Thomas met with the Tibetan Foreign Minister, Surkan Dzasa. Dzasa hoped Tibet’s request for help from the US if his people were threatened by communist China or Russia would be heard. Thomas thought the US would help, but that any aid would depend largely on public opinion which would be needed to sway the Senate and House of Representatives to take any action on Tibet’s behalf.1 Thomas took this to heart and began an extraordinary campaign to promote Tibet to the American public. He and Lowell, Jr. would produce films and lectures, and write books and articles concerning their trip. However, the entertainment value that Thomas believed was so important overshadowed the serious content of the reports they made, ultimately hindering the Thomases’ efforts to help Tibetans.

Tibet had found an advocate in Lowell Thomas, an advocate who would speak with the highest government officials in the US regarding Tibet’s dilemma and use his many connections in American mass media to tell listeners about his experiences in the region. However, by the fall of 1950, to the dismay of all Tibetans, they realized that the US would not prevent the communists from invading Tibet and that Thomas was “just a broadcast journalist.”2 The Tibetan government was wrong about their assumption that Thomas was a US government official, but they were also incorrect that he was “just” a broadcast journalist; and America would soon learn about Thomas’s new passion.

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1 Journal notes of Lowell Thomas, Jr., 1949 August 3 – September, Box 484, Folder 19, LTP.
Thomas was not a typical broadcast journalist of his day. He was America’s favorite news commentator, especially among the middle and lower middle classes, during a time when listening to the radio had become America’s preferred recreational activity. Thomas was selected as America’s favorite news commentator in a 1940 Fortune magazine poll. Listening to the radio was America’s most popular recreational activity during the 1930s and continued to be very popular during the 1940s.

Radio news shows had become a staple in American homes and Thomas’s evening news show aired in a choice time slot, during most listeners’ dinner hour. As one fan put it, “… there was dinner-time quiet while the Thomas radio voice soothed us through each day’s catastrophes.” Thomas was not satisfied with the ability to reach millions of people during his radio news program; he also built on his popularity and ability to influence the public through the publishing, television, and movie industries. However, what truly set Thomas apart from other newsmen of his day was how he viewed his role in the industry. When referring to his 6:45 to 7:00 p.m. news show he said, “You know, I’m not a journalist, but an entertainer, just as Bob Hope and Bing Crosby are entertainers. I am on the air when people are getting ready for dinner or just having dinner, or are just finishing dinner. I never felt it was my responsibility to destroy the digestive system of the American people.”

This chapter will deal with the fact that Thomas viewed himself as more of an entertainer than a newsman, how this concept shaped how he and his son presented their Tibet story to the American public, and the impressive scope of their activity to raise awareness of Tibet in America. It will also discuss the extent to which the Thomases’ labors ultimately helped Tibet.

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3 Douglas, Listening In, 174. Thomas was selected as America’s favorite news commentator in a 1940 Fortune magazine poll. Listening to the radio was America’s most popular recreational activity during the 1930s and continued to be very popular during the 1940s.

4 Horten, Radio Goes to War, 32-33. Horten discussed the importance of radio news to Americans, particularly during WWII. News commentators, like Thomas, became part of a new listen habit among Americans.


Thomas had two audiences for his Tibet story: the US government and the American public, and he presented his story to these two groups in very different ways. When addressing the US government, he relied mainly on facts and his powers of persuasion to try to convince the White House to come to the aid of Tibet. When dealing with the American public he relied more heavily on his old travelogue formula, and often delivered a sensationalized account of his journey, but ultimately with the same goal of winning support for Tibet. He began his story to the American public even before he returned from Tibet via his radio news show.

Edward R. Murrow was filling in for Thomas on the radio on August 22, 1949 when he broke the news that Thomas was in Tibet. Hints had been given on the radio that Thomas was going on another journey during July and the first half of August, but nothing had been confirmed until the August 22nd broadcast. Murrow helped set the tone for how Thomas would personally continue the story of his Tibet exploits. He began that evening’s broadcast:

Some of you may be wondering what I am doing sitting behind the microphone of my friend and neighbor Lowell Thomas. Most of you will know that he's been travelling (for you have heard him from Honolulu and Tokyo).

When he left, he said he was on his way to a destination he thought wise not to mention - not until he actually got in. Publicity might cause a slip-up, difficulties at the last moment - it is that kind of jaunt, that unusual, that hard to arrange, something that might have seemed impossible. But now Lowell Thomas has arrived. He is in the forbidden land of Tibet, the hermit city of Lhasa - the Tibetan City of the Gods.7

The remainder of the broadcast focused on how Thomas’s trip came about and it was spun as a tale of adventure. Murrow then looked back twenty-five years, to Thomas’s participation as the “Official Historian” on the First Flight Around the World. He observed that the year 1949 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of that flight and Thomas wanted to “think up an idea” to

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7 Substitute Broadcasts, Edward R. Murrow, Box 466, Folder 11, LTP. The broadcast was labeled “Edward R. Murrow – August 22, 1949.”
commemorate this historic event.\textsuperscript{8} In fact, he wanted to top it. Thomas had made it into Afghanistan, a closed country, in the 1920s, but his ultimate prize as a world traveler had eluded him. He now had the opportunity “of reaching the most difficult goal of all, getting into Tibet for a trip to Lhasa, the forbidden city.”\textsuperscript{9}

Murrow described the difficulties Thomas had in arranging for permission to travel to Lhasa, working with the Indian government and the challenge of overcoming Tibet’s policy of refusing access to Westerners. Doses of reality were added to the fantastic description of Thomas’s adventure when Murrow said that “In Lhasa, the ministers of the Dalai Lama noted turmoil in Asia, the struggle for power, the wars and aggressions, the menace of Communism.”\textsuperscript{10} The specter of communism was stated as a reason why foreigners were not welcome in Tibet in Murrow’s broadcast, and Thomas would discuss the threat of communism to Tibet and the world throughout his journey. In scripts written for Murrow by Thomas’s staff, Murrow described “how the government of the Dalai Lama has ordered intense vigilance against a spread of Communism in China, where the Reds have been rolling on.”\textsuperscript{11} He also reported that it was Buddhism against Communism and that “Lowell Thomas, who set off on a romantic travel adventure may be in the middle of a first class story ... and he'll have it all to himself.”\textsuperscript{12} This was, of course, just the way Thomas wanted it and he would not reveal the real reason for his invitation to Lhasa until weeks later.

Over the course of ten weeks, from the end of August to early November, Thomas filled the airwaves with tantalizing broadcasts beginning with his journey to Lhasa and ending with his

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
son’s meeting with President Truman. Thomas and Lowell, Jr. alternated between making their pre-recorded broadcasts each evening and the audiotapes were transported back to the US and aired during Thomas’s regular time slot. A guest host would begin the show and set the stage for one of Thomases’ Tibet broadcasts. There was no pretense that Thomas was broadcasting live from half-way around the world; portable tape recorders were considered cutting edge technology at the time and it must have been exciting for his listeners to hear even pre-recorded news stories from such an exotic locale.

Thomas began his Tibet broadcasts with his arrival in India and from the start the language he used was intended to entertain and fill his listeners’ imaginations with images of romance and adventure. When describing his arrival in India, Thomas reported that he was “whisked over southeastern Asia and dropped down in India by the night, as though neither time, nor space existed.” Thomas was preparing his listeners for another flight to adventure, much in the same way that he did with his With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia travelogue. He was inviting his audience once again to “come with me on a magic carpet, out to the land of history, mystery, and romance.” Even Thomas’s own account of the difficulties he faced in traveling to Tibet was used to stimulate his listeners’ imaginations. He was living an adventure that only a few dared to hope for and his audience would come along for the ride through his

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13 Tibet, Other Manuscripts, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP. The Thomases made at least forty-two broadcasts during their time in Tibet, providing enough material to allow Thomas’s guest hosts to air recorded Tibet broadcasts almost every night he was abroad.
14 Ibid. Thomas described his arrival in India during his first Tibet broadcast.
15 World War I, Travelogues, Scripts, “With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia” [part 1], circa 1919, Box 501, Folder 2, LTP.
daily news show to “Forbidden Tibet -- where life today is as it was, 100 years ago, 500 years ago, 1,000 years ago.”16

When comparing the Thomases’ Tibet radio broadcasts to Lowell Thomas, Jr.’s journal and other primary sources documenting their travels to Lhasa, we can see that the Thomases did present a reasonably faithful account of their journey. Certain aspects of the trip were condensed, such as the convoluted nature of the Thomases actually receiving permission to travel to Lhasa. However, both Thomases would continue to romanticize their trip throughout their radio broadcasts. Hyperbole would abound to describe the most unusual aspects of the people, culture, and land that surrounded them, and like any good travel adventure the stark realities of life were left behind. The widespread poverty, poor living conditions, autocratic rule in Tibet and India, which were discussed in their personal papers, were presented in a sanitized fashion in their broadcasts when they were dealt with at all. Apparently, Thomas was responsible for primarily focusing on the “bright, colorful” aspects of Tibet. When Lowell, Jr. suggested they should report on the poor living conditions and the widespread sickness they encountered, his father said they should just discuss the “positive” and let other people talk about the less savory side of Tibet.17 Although they did occasionally enjoy remarking that no American would be able to tolerate some of the living conditions they observed. A comment made by Lowell, Jr. concerning Lhasa encompassed the Thomases attitude about dealing with the day-to-day realities of Tibet: “its few unpleasant aspects… are submerged by the color of its people -- their

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16 Tibet, Other Manuscripts, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP. Taken from Thomas’s first Tibet broadcast, which described his arrival in India and preparations for heading into Tibet.

17 Lowell Thomas, Jr. interview, May 13, 2009, 62-63. This interview was conducted during the research stages of creating a documentary concerning Lowell Thomas. The documentary has yet to be completed.
hospitality and by their ancient oriental customs, and a pageantry that has come down unchanged thru the centuries.”\textsuperscript{18}

Apparently Lowell, Jr. took his father’s advice to heart. When discussing infant mortality during a broadcast, Lowell, Jr. commented that “of the children born only 40 per cent live beyond the age of four -- less than half make the grade! The main reason? -- colds, that turn into pneumonia for lack of medical care. Five doctors can hardly take care of 4 or 5,000,000 people! Apparently folks in Tibet haven't heard about the glories of Ivory soap! (Hmmm! – wonder if that's why Dad arranged this trip? - to sell Ivory! Maybe Nelson can answer that one!)”\textsuperscript{19} He immediately juxtaposes this story with one concerning his host for the evening, Rimshi Doti, who rescued four US Army Air Corps pilots who were forced to bail out in a remote corner of Tibet during WWII.\textsuperscript{20} Lowell, Jr., as his father had done with the Bedouins who worked with T. E. Lawrence in WWI, was portraying the Tibetans as noble savages – the outsiders who had not been corrupted by the evils of civilization and embodied the innate goodness of humanity.

When serious cultural issues were discussed, it was often used as a tool to heighten the sense of drama surrounding their trip. In describing their preparations for their journey by train from Calcutta to Siliguri, Thomas commented that there were recent riots at the Sealdah Railway Station “in which a number of people were killed and many more injured.”\textsuperscript{21} The Thomases piled their “thirty-seven cases and trunks” in their cramped compartment and kept the door

\textsuperscript{18} Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirty-first Tibet broadcast, “Pot of Gold – Lhasa,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
\textsuperscript{19} Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ eighteenth broadcast, “A Night in Kala,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP. Ivory soap was one of Thomas’s sponsors and Nelson Case was the radio announcer that read the Procter and Gamble commercials at the opening and closing of the news program.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases second Tibet broadcast in which Lowell Thomas, Jr.’s broadcast describing his preparations for the Tibet trip, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
bolted, “[f]or we had been warned that robbery was not uncommon.”22 When discussing the one telephone line in Tibet, “a single strand linking Lhasa with Gangtok and the world beyond,” Thomas remarked that “the penalty for cutting down and making off with a section of telephone wire is the forfeiture of a hand - rather harsh having your hand chopped off, but indicative of Tibetan discipline!”23 In his typical fashion, Thomas presented all of his experiences with enthusiasm. Even when facing landslides and flooding, it was merely another exciting part of the adventure. Thomas was not changing his storytelling style for his latest escapade, and it would quickly become apparent that he would continue the tradition of portraying Tibet as Shangri-La.

During a brief respite while their caravan of pack animals and porters was being readied to begin the trek into Tibet, the Thomases waited at the home of Harishwar Dayal, the Indian political officer. Thomas used this time to comment on a meeting Dayal had with a high ranking Bhutanese official “in his red skirt and bare feet -- doesn't speak English. In fact he doesn't know where America is. And as we sit here waiting… America seems far enough away to be on another planet.”24 Both Thomases would refer to Tibet as otherworldly, presenting a travel experience that was unattainable to the average person. This portrayal of Tibet would become significant as other pressures in American society would ultimately distract the American public from the troubles of Shangri-La.

However, just when Thomas’s listeners were settling down for another entertaining story about his Tibet journey, he would touch on a serious aspect of the trip such as Tibet’s concern

22 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases third Tibet broadcast, “Across Bengal by Night,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
23 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ fifteenth Tibet broadcast, “Into the Chumbi Valley.” 09 August 1949, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
24 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ fifth Tibet broadcast, “Gantok,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
over communist encroachment. While he was still in Gangtok, Thomas described an encounter with a Tibetan who was returning to Lhasa after a five-year stay in China. The Tibetan had left China “because the Nationalists have been so over-whelmingly defeated by the Communists and the Tibetans don't want anything to do with the Reds.” Thomas continued to include stories about communist hating Tibetans and how they could help stop the spread of communism in an attempt to get American public opinion on the side of Tibet. “For the Tibetans hate communism and say they will never have anything to do with it. And they may play a vital role in stemming the Red tide.” He also tells much of the story from Tibet’s point of view, claiming that it has been an independent country since 1912 and “that Tibet will knuckle under to no other nation!” These examples demonstrate the seesaw-like rhythm of his broadcasts; Thomas would start off with an exciting introduction to a story, touch on a more serious aspect of the journey, and then he would go right back to another anecdote. He used a similar approach to his regular news broadcasts, but this style of reporting gave his Tibet stories an almost ethereal quality that presented his journey as being unattainable to his listeners.

The embellished accounts of the Thomases’ travels were wide ranging, and included references to the “Tibetan Gods” causing an avalanche to block their progress, “yak tails that are used for Santa Claus beards in the United States,” and their approach to the “mysterious city of Lhasa.” Even when discussing potential dangers on their trail, Thomas would add a sensational touch. They passed monkshood, a plant known for its poisonous qualities that,

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25 Ibid.
26 Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirty-sixth broadcast, “What about the Chinese Reds?” 31 August 1949, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
27 Ibid. Thomas noted that the Tibetan government claimed they had been an independent country since 1912, even though officials in Tibet had told him the date was 1911. Apparently he was referring to the de facto independence Tibet experienced from China starting in 1912, which lasted until 1950.
28 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From various broadcast transcripts in the bound volume of “Tibet Broadcasts,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
according to Thomas, the Tibetans used to poison the British, and in another story Thomas talked about a point in their travels when they passed an area known for a “marauding tiger.” Thomas commented coyly, “And we wouldn't want to meet Master Stripes on one of these dizzy Himalayan trails.” They also frequently noted the spectacular landscape they were traveling through. The Thomases slept in towns a half mile higher than any residence in America. They passed through a “forest of giant pines, every tree dripping with a light yellow moss… as though a fairy princess had passed through the forest dropping her golden tresses on the trees.”

Thomas also focused on the most sensational Tibetan social customs rather than providing a balanced account of the culture. He discussed the Tibetans’ habit of greeting people by sticking out their tongues and sucking in air to make a hissing noise, men wearing turquoise earrings, throwing stones at shrines for good luck, using yak dung for fuel, and giving white scarves to welcome a visitor. A favorite of Thomas’s appeared to be polyandry, and while in the Chumbi Valley he interviewed a Tibetan woman concerning this custom. A portion of the interview went as follows:

L. T. “Tsewong Namyal, how many husbands do Tibetan women have?”

T. N.: “Usually not more than four.”

L. T.: “And when there is more than one husband in a home, in that happy home, which husband has priority? Which one gets the better of it so far as connubial rights are concerned?”

T. N.: “Which husband is number one? Which is on top? That depends on which one wins the top place in the wife's affections…”

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29 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From broadcast transcript eight, “To Changu” in the bound volume of “Tibet Broadcasts.” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
30 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From broadcast transcript thirteen, “The Chumbi Valley” in the bound volume of “Tibet Broadcasts.” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
31 Ibid.
The Thomases’ descriptions of Tibetan landscape and people being other worldly continued throughout their broadcasts, setting the stage for their lectures, books, articles, and films.

When drafting broadcasts, Thomas’s writing style was always approachable; he never wanted his audience to feel threatened by complicated language. His son followed suit. Their styles were unwavering, even when dealing with serious topics such as Tibet’s fear of communist encroachment. The language they used when discussing this politically charged topic was overly folksy, detracting from the gravity of the situation for the Tibetans. Their August 10, 1949 broadcast discussed the Chinese Nationalists that were asked by the Tibetan government to leave Lhasa. The Tibetans intended this action to demonstrate their independence from China’s Nationalist government and the rapidly encroaching Communist government. It’s obvious that Thomas understood the danger for Tibet, but as he told his listening audience about “the new Red regime in China” which “would mean Communists in Tibet with a grave possibility of the Russians butting in, danger of communist infiltration into Tibet, the most religious of all lands, the Home of Buddhism, the land ruled for centuries by Lamas, the ascetic monks,”32 it must have been difficult for his American audience to relate to Tibet’s impending crisis when they heard this in conjunction with all of Thomas’s humorous anecdotes.

Thomas continued to discuss pressing concerns for Tibetans. He was open about favoring an independent Tibet and offered the following suggestion for how Tibetans should handle the communist threat:

Obviously the thing for the Tibetans to do - the only thing they could do, was revolt in a hurry - deny China any right, once and for all, to say that Tibet was never a part of China's sphere of influence. Then, if the Nationalists were driven from China, the Tibetans could say to the new communist government Mao Tse-_________

32 Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ fourteenth broadcast “We Meet the Chinese.” 10 August 1949, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
Tung [Mao Zedong]: Too bad, but we are an entirely independent country. Maybe you can send a diplomatic envoy to Tibet – and maybe not. But you can't send any mission to butt in and tell us about anything. We are an independent nation the same as you are. 33

He also believed that the Tibetan government’s decision to remove the Chinese Nationalists from Tibet was correct and stated, “all but traders, out you go.” 34

Thomas’s broadcasts tended to be fairly neutral when it came to politics; he knew his audience would object if he were patently biased towards someone running for political office for instance, 35 but he also knew when he would be able to stray over the line of impartiality. Denouncing communism to his American audience was undoubtedly one of those times. The House of Representatives formed the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to investigate communist sympathizers within the US in 1938 and by 1947 the urgency of these investigations was renewed. Americans were worried that the Soviet Union was bent on world domination. The US became the preeminent economic and military world power after WWII, and Americans soon found themselves entangled in the Cold War. The Soviet Union came to be synonymous with communism, and the US government assured its citizens that communism was a clear and present threat to all freedom-loving Americans. 36 J. Howard McGrath, the Attorney

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 He made this mistake during the 1944 US presidential election when he appeared to be supporting his good friend, Thomas E. Dewey, over Franklin D. Roosevelt. Thomas’s listeners criticized him for this breach in trust and he apologized.
General under President Truman, said: “There are today many Communists in America. They are everywhere -- in factories, offices, butcher stores, on street corners, in private businesses. And each carries in himself the germ of death for society.” 37 Many US government officials believed that there were communist spies in every level of the government and this led to a general fear and paranoia concerning communism among a majority of Americans. US domestic fears reflected a very real problem as communism spread through Eastern Europe and, in 1950, the US engaged communist forces from China on the Korean peninsula. Thomas took advantage of Americans’ general fear and hatred of communism, and what it came to represent, to promote Tibet’s cause.

The Thomases continued making their broadcasts on their way to Lhasa and marveled at what they saw all around them. “Today we came upon our first great herds of Yaks in the distance were the black Yak hair tents of the shepherds. Reminding us that this is a country of nomads - as well as of mysterious cities.” 38 And the Thomases continued, “There is almost nothing about a Tibetan journey that is like anything else on earth. This is the land of Lost Horizon. No planes, trains, trams, autos, bicycles -- not a wheel in Tibet. Yet it is a land with an ancient and highly developed civilization of its own, utterly unlike our western civilization which has now affected all other countries -- all but this.” 39 About mid-way through their journey, Thomas injected some local folklore into a broadcast. “We had come to a sinister spot. We must stop and appease the demons. At this point there are two chortens - small pagodas. The larger one, across the valley from us, contains a copper urn. When that chorten was built the people

38 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ seventeenth broadcast, “From Gautsa on to Phari,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
39 Ibid.
poured blood into the urn, and sacrificed an eight year old boy and girl. Then, all unexpectedly, the Tibetans say a demon took over, and made this a dangerous locality for human beings ever since.\(^{40}\) Once again Thomas was creating a metaphorical distance in additional to a geographical distance between Tibet and his radio listening audience.

On their way to Lhasa, Thomas commented on the “great mineral wealth” in the mountains they were passing through. He speculated “that there must be lots of gold in these mountains… but as hard as we looked we didn’t find any of those golden nuggets.”\(^{41}\) Thomas was adding more fodder to his portrayal of Tibet as a place you could only reach at the end of a rainbow. During a report by Lowell, Jr. from Lhasa, he tried to make their journey more relevant to his listeners. He told his American listening audience that Tibetans “have many of the same concerns” as Americans, and “not all of their thoughts have to do with matters of religion.”\(^{42}\) He also discussed the Tibetans’ concerns about communist encroachment from China in an attempt to allow his American audience to relate to Tibetans. His efforts may have been too late.

After over thirty broadcasts building on the idea of Tibet as a modern-day Shangri-La, many Americans may have already decided they could have nothing in common with the remote and inaccessible land that the Thomases had described. They had been in Tibet for almost a month, and had already reached Lhasa, before the Thomases stated in one of their broadcasts that the Tibetan government hoped that independent Americans would come to the aid of Tibet. They were starting their campaign to raise American public opinion in order to encourage action by the US House and Senate on Tibet’s behalf. The Thomases made suggestions concerning

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ twenty-second broadcast, “Deep in Tibet.” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
\(^{42}\) Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirty-fourth broadcast, “Conversations with Tibetans in Lhasa,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
how Tibet could avoid a communist invasion on their radio broadcast, all of which were intended to give Americans a broader understanding of Tibetans. Interestingly, Lowell, Jr. added that the timing of all these suggestions “would depend upon how soon the Reds move.”43 The Thomases were continually using the West’s fear of communism to inspire Americans to support Tibet’s bid for freedom. However, the timing of these suggestions may have fallen on deaf ears in the US. It must have been difficult for the average listener to relate to a land that you could only find at the end of the rainbow.

While the Thomases were in Lhasa their supernatural descriptions of Tibet intensified. Thomas talked about their audience with the Dalai Lama in their thirtieth Tibet broadcast. “As we have already mentioned, a visit to this Land of the Lamas is like being transported from the twentieth century all the way back to the Middle Ages. This is doubly true when you come face to face with the Tibetan God-King, the Dalai Lama. In fact you have the feeling that somehow you have left the planet Earth.”44 Lowell, Jr. consistently used romanticized language when he discussed “Lamaland.”45 As he described his first day in Lhasa he said, “I feel as if we have been in another world, as indeed we have; a fairyland of ancient splendor.”46 His father tended to portray what he believed his audiences would consider the mystical or sensational aspects of religion or ceremonial practices in Tibet. He spoke of Tibetan monks waking him in the middle of the night while they were trying to drive demons from a hut by blowing on horns made of

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43 Ibid.
44 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirtieth broadcast, “The D. L. Audience,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
45 Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirty-first Tibet broadcast, “A Chat with His Highness the Regent and photographing the D. L,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
46 Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ twenty-ninth broadcast, “Our First Day in Tibetan Capital,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
bone and beating drums and a lamasery where “the lamas, monks, and nuns all live under the same roof” and did not practice celibacy. All of the babies that resulted from this “big happy family” became monks or nuns “dedicated to the service of Buddha” but “they don't quite know who their parents are.”

When Thomas discussed the structure of Tibetan society and government, he did it to give an account of Tsarong Shapé, “The Richest Man in Tibet.” Thomas presented Shapé’s rise to power as a rags-to-riches story using “the last completely feudal state on our planet” as the backdrop. Thomas’s description of the structure of Tibetan society was not inaccurate, but it was sensationalized to heighten the excitement of his story, once again making it difficult for his American audience to understand Tibetan culture. Typically, Thomas’s audience would only get a sense of the hierarchy in Tibet when he referred to the men hired to carry their equipment and supplies as “coolies,” or offered stories about the peasants, townspeople, Tibetan officials, and lamas they encountered. Thomas’s portrayal of status in Tibet must have seemed surreal to his listeners. At one point in their journey they encountered a group of fifty Tibetans on horseback and the Thomases could “scarcely believe” their eyes. They were witnessing a procession of a “rich man and his entourage” all in brightly colored “oriental costumes,” and to them it was like witnessing something from a “thousand years ago.” They noted that a “forerunner carried a whip to make sure that townsmen and peasants along the way bowed down before the great man.”

The scene was described as just another part of the adventure for the Thomases and nothing was

47 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ twenty-second broadcast, “Deep in Tibet,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
48 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ twenty-third broadcast, “Our Longest Day’s March,” 24 August 1949, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
49 Ibid.
50 Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirty-sixth Tibet broadcast (this is one of two broadcasts labeled XXXVI), “Tsarong – Richest Man in Tibet.” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
51 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ nineteenth broadcast, “The End of the Line,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
said about the oppressive conditions for the Tibetan peasants. The same approach was taken by the Thomases when they discussed Tibetan religion.\textsuperscript{52} They would take the time to differentiate between Tibetan Buddhism and other forms of Buddhism found around the world, but the tone of the broadcasts were rarely serious for more than a few moments, before they resumed injecting humor into their stories.\textsuperscript{53}

Lowell, Jr. suggested during one of their later Tibet radio broadcasts that the Tibetans were interested in establishing closer relations with the US. “Why were the bars lowered for us? I think because of Tibet's grave concern at the Communist sweep of Asia, and her desire to make friends of America.”\textsuperscript{54} The broadcasts noted all of the special privileges the Thomases received from the Tibetan government. The Thomases were even honored with performances by three bands and a group of bagpipers who played “Marching thru Georgia,” “God Save the King,” and “Auld Lang Syne” for them.\textsuperscript{55} Lowell, Jr., once again tried to make Tibetans more relatable to Americans.

On October 24, 1949, shortly after his return to the airwaves following his accident in Tibet, Thomas announced that “the United States may recognize the independence of Tibet” and “that American recognition might clear the way for giving aid to the secluded nation on the roof-of-the-world -- aid against the danger of red penetration from China.”\textsuperscript{56} He reported that this information came from a United Press correspondent who was questioning officials at the State

\textsuperscript{52} Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirty-seventh Tibet broadcast, “The Monasteries,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
\textsuperscript{53} Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirty-eighth Tibet broadcast, “The Monks of Sera and of Drepung,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP. Lowell Thomas, Jr. described his and his father’s experiences at the Sera and Drepung monasteries.
\textsuperscript{54} Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ thirty-first Tibet broadcast, “A Chat with His Highness the Regent and photographing the D. L.” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
\textsuperscript{55} Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ twenty-ninth Tibet broadcast, “Our First Day in Tibetan Capital,” Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
\textsuperscript{56} Tibet, Other Manuscripts. From the Thomases’ forty-first Tibet broadcast, October 24, 1949, Box 464, Folder 22, LTP.
Department concerning the Thomases’ trip to Tibet and the messages they delivered to President Truman from the Tibetan government. Thomas noted that the US historically considered Tibet to be a province of China, but that State Department officials had admitted that the US always realized that the sovereignty of China over Tibet was "something of a myth." Thomas added that the “Dalai Lama, the Regent and all the heads of the Tibetan government are going to be much pleased when they hear that.”

Thomas was making bold statements concerning how the US government might intervene on Tibet’s behalf. He also told his listeners that the news from London reported that there were deposits of uranium in Tibet, “the material of the atomic bomb.” Thomas had previously pointed out Tibet’s geographic location being of strategic importance to China, and now he was playing on Americans’ fears of a nuclear threat from communist Russia. He also suggested that if the US were to recognize Tibet as an independent nation and provided military aid, it might win US support from the millions of Buddhists in Asia, “whose good-will could mean a great deal in the present world crisis.” Thomas apparently agreed with Truman and believed that having the support of Buddhists around the world could help the US in its fight against communism.

Thomas’s sensational Tibet stories did not go unchallenged by the political left in the US. Bob Lauter, a columnist from the Daily Worker, the newspaper of the Communist Party USA, was highly critical of Thomas. Lauter wrote:

Lowell Thomas continues to play his recent trip to Tibet for all it is worth. What started as a story of mild interest, much hoopla, and dubious political aspects is now full-blown burlesque.

Those of you who are confused by Lowell Thomas’ hysterical defense of Tibet from the Communist menace must understand that Tibet is a stronghold of

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
democracy. This 15 year-old Dalai Lama was selected for instance in a thoroughly democratic fashion.

Thomas, by the way, failed singularly in giving his audience what might have been vital information about Tibet. He glossed over issues and crises in order to give us The National Geographic picture. He might just have mentioned the rate of infant mortality among Tibetans which is among the highest in the world. 60

What is most interesting about this comment is that Lauter was more critical of Thomas for not telling his audience about the serious issues he and his son encountered in Tibet than his comments about communism.

Shortly after arriving back in the US Thomas wrote sixteen pages analyzing Tibet for strategic purposes in the fight against communism. He started his analysis by stating that he considered Tibet to be “the Number One Eldorado [sic] for travelers,” 61 but that is where his embellishment ends. It is an interesting juxtaposition, and one has to wonder if it was a conscious decision on Thomas’s part to write this report or narrative in this fashion. It is important to note this because it shows Thomas’s two repeated themes of emphasis concerning Tibet: Tibet as Eldorado, the mecca for travelers, and Tibet as a strategic resource for the fight against communism. It appears that Thomas originally intended this narrative for Gordon Manning, a journalist with the United Press, but it is unclear if Thomas ever sent his write-up to Manning. 62 He analyzed various aspects of Tibet and Tibetan culture, including: Tibet’s geographic remoteness, how one would travel to Tibet, how long it would take, the difficulties of traveling in Tibet, the difficulties of flying into Tibet (it would be possible to fly in despite the high altitude, but getting a fuel supply would be difficult), explorers who wrote about Tibet,

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60 Bob Lauter, "Lowell Thomas, Commentator and Defender of the Faith," Daily Worker (Nov. 17, 1949): 5. Lowell, Jr. did discuss infant mortality in Tibet during a broadcast, but the topic was mentioned in light-hearted fashion.

61 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. “Tibetan Notes,” [October 27, 1949], Box 464, Folder 22, LTP. Some of Thomas’s notes can be found at the end of the Tibet broadcasts.

62 Ibid. Thomas wrote Gordon Manning’s name in pencil at the top of the first page and crossed it out. He also crossed out “L.T.’s Notes on Tibet” and settled on “Tibetan Notes.”

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where the Chinese were most likely to invade, and where Tibetan guerilla forces would be able
to hamper a Chinese invasion. He also discussed Westerners and Americans that travelled to, or
attempted to travel to, Tibet over the last few centuries. He questioned how long Tibet could
remain isolated. He pointed to Tibet as being the only thing stopping communist China from
sweeping over India, and examined the ease with which the Chinese could enter Tibet with a
“mechanized force.” Thomas questioned the loyalty of the Tibetan army. He wondered if the
army would turn against the Tibetan government in the face of an invasion. The Tibetan soldiers
were not paid and he noticed that they appeared to pay little heed to orders from their officers.
He had also heard stories that the Tibetan soldiers were known to take what they wanted from
the locals. Thomas argued that the Tibetans’ religious devotion would keep them from accepting
communism, unless they were invaded and overrun by China. Thomas may not have understood
that Tibetan Buddhists had a limited influence over the global Buddhist world, but it is more
likely he believed Americans did not know this fact. He may have been using the devotion of
Tibetans as a way to encourage his more pious listeners to make a sympathetic connection with
Tibet. Thomas was also either unaware or ignorant of the fact that Mao Zedong did not banish
Buddhism in China and that in 1953 the Buddhist Association of Chinese was established to act
as a guiding body over Buddhism throughout the country. When it came to fighting
communism, Thomas asked questions that were on the minds of many Americans at the time:
“Will the Communists get control of all Asia? Will they cut us off from some of our most
important sources of raw materials? And in the end will they arm Asia's more than a billion

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63 Bayer, “From Out of This World to the Cold War,” 58.
history of Buddhism in China read, Ch’en, Kenneth, Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey (Princeton: Princeton
population for a final show-down war?" Thomas suggested that help might be given to Tibet in two ways: “More up to date armament, and experts to train them in guerrilla warfare.” Interestingly, Thomas noted in his report that Tibet was getting some modern weapons from India. He did not indicate if he was aware that the US government was ultimately supplying these weapons.

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Between 1949 and 1980, hundreds of newspaper articles were written by the Thomases—and by others—concerning their Tibet experience. The articles appeared in national newspapers across the country and fell into two main categories: stories by or about the Thomases experiences in Tibet; and stories or reviews of their various Tibet films, lectures, and books. The content of the stories ranged from the serious to the fantastic. Thomas reported Tibet’s concern of being overthrown by communism, a fear that reached a hysterical pitch during the late 1940s and early 1950s in America. The Thomases’ travel films tended to receive more surreal treatment from the newspapers. “Lowell Thomas’ color-glorified travelogue… is on view” with “mysterious monasteries and their monks, of whom the Red Hats marry and the Yellow Hats do not” and “there’s the golden roofed Potala, the Dalai Lama’s winter palace, with

66 Ibid.
67 Knaus, Beyond Shangri-La, 69-70. Knaus discussed Washington’s plans to provide “small-scale ‘covert assistance in the form of specialized military instruction and supplies to the Tibetans” via the Indian government.
69 Robert Trumbull, “Tibet Fears Told by Lowell Thomas.” New York Times (Oct. 11, 1949): 21. Thomas gave this report while on the rescue plane in India. He spoke about Tibet as being the most anti-communist country in the world and that Tibetans lived in terror that their country would be overthrown. The spread of communism during the Cold War was a very real fear for many Americans and this article was designed to play on those fears.
a Tibetan guardsman 12 feet tall.” The articles that delved into the political aspects of the Thomases’ trip tended to maintain a serious tone, but there was an irresistible tendency for the Thomases and others to sensationalize other aspects of their journey, which must have continued to muddle how Americans viewed Thomases’ exploits in Tibet.

The many magazine articles the Thomases published were slightly more subdued than the newspaper articles and radio news stories, but in one instance the choice of publication was out of the ordinary for the Thomases. Lowell Thomas, Sr. stayed true to form and published his Tibet articles in mainstream periodicals such as *Collier’s Weekly*, *Reader’s Digest*, *Boy’s Life*, *Omnibook*, and *Guideposts*. Perhaps because Lowell Thomas, Jr. was young, handsome, and did not have the fan-base of his father, he took what appeared to be a risk and published an article in *Modern Man* magazine. Its subtitle, *The Picture Magazine for Men*, told its readers what to expect. The magazine, which predated *Playboy*, included photos of nude women, many of whom were popular actresses or models of the day. It was rife with popular culture and featured luxury and sports cars, and adult humor. Publishing in *Modern Man* was out of character for Lowell, Jr.’s clean-cut image, but he and his father seemed determined to reach as wide an audience as possible when sharing their message concerning Tibet.

The most significant of the Thomases’ articles was published by Lowell, Sr. His *Air Intelligence* article was written for a very focused and serious military audience, and detailed Thomas’s thoughts on using Tibet to help halt the spread of communism in Asia. Perhaps the most important articles he and his son wrote for a general audience were included as part of a series of six stories that were published between February and March of 1950 in *Collier’s*

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70 G. K. [only initials of the author were given] “Tibet Visit Put on Film by Thomas.” *Los Angeles Times*. (Dec. 27 1954): B8. The entire article gave a sensationalized account of Thomas’s travelogue.
*Magazine*, a popular weekly periodical. The first article was entitled “Out of This World: A journey to Lhasa,” a title of which the Thomases became very fond. In this series, Thomas presented a vivid overview of the communist consolidation of power in the East and he laid out the strategic reasons China would be interested in Tibet. He went into some detail about the advantage China would have if it gained an influence over the Buddhist world via its conquest of Lhasa. Thomas also delved into his interactions with Tibetans officials and their desire for American aid. He described the domino effect that might occur if China took Tibet. Once the communist Chinese had control of Tibet, they would have an easy approach to India, and then the rest of Asia would fall. He presented his argument so it was apparent to the reader that this was not only a problem for Tibet and the US government to contend with, it was also an issue that the American public needed to address, and public opinion was needed to push Congress into action. Thomas reused a great deal of information in all of his articles and he appears to have used many of the ideas he developed in his write-up to Gordon Manning.

Although there was a serious message in Thomas’s *Collier’s* articles, it was couched in a tantalizing narrative. Before the start of the first story, there was an introductory line setting the tone of the text: “Beyond India, deep behind the massive Himalayas, lies Tibet - the Shangri-La of romance. For centuries a forbidden land, it seethes now with rumor and intrigue, fearfully aware that it has become a prize in the Red game for domination of Asia.” Whether it was in 1950 or a decade later, the Thomases took the same approach to spreading the word about Tibet.

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73 Tibet, Other Manuscripts. “Tibetan Notes,” [October 27, 1949], Box 464, Folder 22, LTP. Thomas liked to reuse his material, so it would have been natural for him to incorporate the narrative he wrote to Manning in his *Collier’s* article.
In an issue of the trade magazine *The Merck Review*, the article “On the Roof of the World” told a sensationalized account of how the Merck pharmaceutical company and Lowell Thomas took part in a “secret mission” to get the new miracle drug, Cortisone, to Reggie Fox in Lhasa.\(^7\) Ten years later, Thomas wrote an article in the *Reader’s Digest* entitled “Terror in Tibet” discussing the atrocities that took place in Tibet after the 1950 invasion. Again, the article is preceded by an introductory synopsis telling readers they were about to embark on a tale of “torture and murder” carried out by the “Chinese Reds.”\(^6\) The article itself was a relatively somber portrayal of the many torments the Tibetans suffered at the hands of communist China during the 1950s.

The Thomases also wrote several books that discussed their Tibet expedition or various aspects of Tibet, but, surprisingly, Lowell, Jr. took the lead in this area. The senior Thomas was well known for his travel writing; however, he encouraged his son to assume this role.\(^7\) Perhaps he wanted to give his son greater exposure in his young career, but whatever the reason Lowell, Jr. must have started writing almost immediately after their return to the US in October of 1949. *Out of This World: Across the Himalayas to Forbidden Tibet* was published in the spring of 1950, and the similar and evocative title suggests that the Thomases hoped readers would assume it was a continuation of Thomas’s *Collier’s* articles. Lowell, Jr. relied heavily on his Tibet journal and radio broadcast scripts to produce the bulk of his book, but he also added historical elements to the narrative so readers would better understand the long history between China and Tibet. The book received considerable pre-publication publicity and became an international


\(^7\) Lowell Thomas, Jr. interview, May 13, 2009: 49. Lowell Thomas, Jr. commented that his father encouraged him to write the book about their expedition to Tibet. He seemed surprised by this since his father was a well-known author, but no further reason why Thomas made this concession to his son is given.
best seller.\textsuperscript{78} Lowell, Jr. went on an extensive lecture tour to promote his first book and addressed tens of thousands of people in the Chicago area alone.\textsuperscript{79} It became America’s number one bestseller in 1950 and continued to out sell every other book on the market in 1951, retailing over 86,000 copies in six weeks at one of its high points.\textsuperscript{80} *Out of This World* was the most popular book the Thomases wrote that discussed Tibet, and just as in their radio broadcasts, newspaper, and magazine articles, it continued to tell serious and embellished tales of their expedition.

There was no doubt that Lowell, Jr. intended *Out of This World* to be a tale of adventure. Full-page advertisements in national newspapers enticed readers to buy a copy of the book with tantalizing headlines and statements. “Here’s Your Passport to Forbidden Shangri-La,” “Intimate Inside Facts About the RED TERROR in Tibet!,” and “NOW The Complete Inside Story Awaited By Millions of Lowell Thomas Fans THE LOWELL THOMAS GREAT ADVENTURE OUT OF THIS WORLD ACROSS THE HIMALAYS TO FORBIDDEN TIBET.”\textsuperscript{81} The advertisements also indicated that Thomas was the star of the story and potential book buyers had to look closely to note that *Out of This World* was written by his son. Lowell, Jr. started with his father’s “miracle telegram” and wrote about the “mysterious mountain kingdom beyond the towering Himalayas on the very roof of the world,” and how it had “long

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\textsuperscript{79} Warner, “High Adventure on Top of the World,” B3.

\textsuperscript{80} Display Ad. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 26, 1950: J20. Full page advertisement for *Out of This World* from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, August 18, 2015; Display Ad. *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1951: D5. Small advertisement noting that *Out of This World* was America’s number one best seller; Display Ad. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 February 4, 1951: H12. Full page advertisement stating 86,000 copies of *Out of This World* sold in six weeks; “The Best Sellers” *New York Times*, May 13, 1951: n.p. *Out of This World* was listed as the sixth top selling book under the “General” category.

\textsuperscript{81} Display Ad. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 November 26, 1950: J20 from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 18 August 2015. Full page advertisement for *Out of This World*. 223
been the Number One Eldorado for explorers and travelers with a keen appetite for the unknown.\textsuperscript{82} He continued to compare their trip to a living fairytale and Hilton’s \textit{Lost Horizon}. Even the account of their departure from Tibet gave his readers the impression he and his father were stepping out of a novel. “We felt that we were coming out of the 7\textsuperscript{th} century into the 20\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{83} Readers responded to his narrative with enthusiasm and it was common to see a notice in national daily papers concerning sales for \textit{Out of This World} or a promotional appearance by Lowell, Jr.\textsuperscript{84} Newspaper reviews tended to be very positive, but journal reviews were less generous.\textsuperscript{85} The \textit{Geographical Journal} described the narrative as being written in the “idiom of [a] young American” and that it would appeal only to “armchair travelers,” but it was doubtful that the “potted accounts” of Tibet would appeal to serious explorers.\textsuperscript{86} B. J. Gould, a former British Political Officer who served in Tibet for years, forgave Lowell, Jr.’s occasional errors and familiar writing style, and was more concerned with the fact that “there appears to be an active demand in the United States for authentic information about Tibet,” but a lack of available sources.\textsuperscript{87}

In 1959, a few months after China’s military crackdown on the Tibetan rebels in Kham and Amdo, which led to the subsequent Tibetan Uprising, Lowell, Jr. published his book \textit{The Silent War in Tibet}.\textsuperscript{88} The first seventy-two pages recounted the Thomases Tibet expedition and the remainder of the book discussed Chinese control of Tibet since 1951. Lowell, Jr. relied

\textsuperscript{82} Thomas, Jr., \textit{Out of This World}, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 305.
\textsuperscript{85} Warner, “High Adventure on Top of the World,” B3. Mason was one of the many newspaper reviewers that praised Lowell Thomas, Jr.’s book.
\textsuperscript{88} Lowell Thomas, Jr. \textit{The Silent War in Tibet}, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1959). Reviews of \textit{The Silent War in Tibet} started appearing in journals and newspapers by August of 1959, only five months after the start of the Tibetan Uprising.
predominantly on press reports from India, official reports from China, and testimony from Tibetan exiles. The narrative portrays the conflict as good versus evil, with China oppressing a lyric paradise. The sensational journalistic style is present and there is much in the book that appears to be hastily written. The book reports the tragedy of the Tibetan Rebellion using inaccurate and unsubstantiated information, but it is one of the few books of its time, aside from Fosco Maraini’s *Secret Tibet*,\(^8^9\) that brought the situation in Tibet to light. The Thomases continued to be amongst the few people that were consistently reporting on what was happening in Tibet and they certainly had the highest public profiles of any that had taken up Tibet’s cause.

In 1960, Lowell, Jr. published *The Dalai Lama: A Biography of the Exiled Leader of Tibet*. His biography of the 14\(^{th}\) Dalai Lama was written in a more a serious manner, avoiding much of the sensationalistic language that appeared in his previous books. It also received very little press attention compared to his previous efforts. It appears that unless Lowell, Jr. was offering his readers a travel adventure the newspapers were not interested in it.\(^9^0\) The Thomases did not write an entire book dedicated to Tibet again, but they did include chapters about their Tibet expedition in future books. In 1977, Thomas published *So Long Until Tomorrow: From Quaker Hill to Kathmandu*, the second volume in his autobiography, and he included a chapter describing their Tibet journey and meeting with President Truman.\(^9^1\) When discussing the political interaction with the White House, Thomas merely noted that Truman and Acheson believed there was nothing the US could do for Tibet. He entirely failed to mention all the publicity they garnered for Tibet in the decades after 1949 or the Tibetan refugee organization he established in 1959 (to be discussed in detail in the next chapter). Decades later, in 2013,\(^8^9\) Maraini, *Secret Tibet*.

\(^9^0\) A search of fifteen newspaper databases, including *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post*, did not result in any articles or reviews concerning *The Dalai Lama*.

\(^9^1\) Thomas, *So Long Until Tomorrow*. Thomas recounted his Tibet trip in chapter four, “The Journey to Shangri-La.”
Lowell, Jr. published his own autobiography, *Lowell Thomas, Jr., Flight to Adventure: Alaska and Beyond*.92 Again, their Tibet journey was recounted, but with even less emphasis on the political aspects of the trip, and there was very little mention of anything he or his father did to promote or help Tibet in later years.

Equally significant to the Thomases efforts to promote Tibet were the various versions of the films they produced for lectures, theatrical release, and television. Upon their return from Tibet, Lowell, Jr. edited his 16mm Kodachrome film into an hour-and-a-half lecture film.93 The Thomases started their lecture tour in January of 1950, and they maintained a hectic schedule through the end of 1951.94 The lecture was alternatively called “Inside Forbidden Tibet” and “Out of This World: A Journey to Lhasa”95 The talk was in great demand due to the heavy publicity it received from the Thomases’ Tibet broadcasts, news of Thomas’s accident, and the *Collier’s* articles. The Thomases appeared several times together on tour, with Thomas still on his crutches. When the joint appearances occurred, Thomas would introduce the lecture and step aside to allow his son to narrate the film.96 When Thomas was not part of the lecture Lowell, Jr. would deliver it solo. He attracted large crowds, lecturing to an audience of approximately 10,000 at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. A professional projectionist used the most powerful arc projector available at the time and music recorded at the Lhasa summer festival was

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93 Unpublished draft of Lowell Thomas, Jr. autobiography (circa early 1990s), Biog D, “After Tibet,” 2.
94 *Out of This World* (Lecture and Film), Box 471, LTP. Itineraries of the Thomases lecture tour can be found in box 471. Notices for the Thomases Tibet lecture appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Daily Tribune* throughout 1950 and 1951. (ProQuest Historical Newspapers.)
95 Classified Ad. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 October 15, 1950: G1. What was apparently the same Tibet lecture given by the Thomases was called “Inside Forbidden Tibet” and “Out of This World: A Journey to Lhasa” in various newspaper advertisements.
96 Unpublished draft of Lowell Thomas, Jr. autobiography (circa early 1990s), Biog D, “After Tibet,” 2. Lowell Thomas, Jr. wrote that his father told audiences his son did most of the photography, so this indicated that he was turning the lecture over to him.
timed to the film. The lecture also included sound recordings of monks chanting at Drepung, porters singing while carrying loads, and monks blowing conch horns.97

Lowell, Jr.’s lecturing schedule was full from the start of 1950. He often gave his talk every day for weeks at a time, with travel time often being his only break. He also appeared at a variety of venues from junior high school auditoriums to Carnegie Hall.98 Whether the lecture was delivered jointly or just by Lowell, Jr. the Thomases regularly packed theaters.99 An interesting aspect of the newspapers coverage of the Tibet travelogue lecture was the relatively serious reporting it received. The dramatic language was not in evidence in the articles and the numerous advertisements typically just stated an upcoming lecture’s time and place.100 However, the narrative of the travelogue made up for any bland advertising in the papers. With an introduction reminiscent of the start of Thomas’s With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia lecture, the Thomases launched into a tale that was apparently only meant to entertain and distract its audiences from the world around them.

You say you are tired of the Cold War, weary of hearing about the Communist conquest of Asia, awfully tired of hearing about strikes, spies, congressional hearings - and paying taxes? You are fed up with television, the atom bomb, and the B-bomb? Your mother-in-law has just come to spend the winter with you - and you would like to escape somewhere right out of this World? You would? Well, fasten your safety belt, come with me - let's visit Shangri La.101

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97 Ibid. Lowell Thomas, Jr. noted that the audio was hooked into the auditorium’s PA system and he could control the volume, and start and stop the audio from the podium.
98 Tibet, Out of This World [lecture and film], “Itinerary and travel arrangements” 1950-1951, Box 471, Folders 7-11 LTP.
99 Tibet, Newspaper clippings, January – April 1950. “3500 at Thomas Travelogue,” Washington Post (January 24, 1950):1, Box 472, Folder 6, LTP. One of many articles that can be found in US national papers describing the popularity of the Thomases’ Tibet travelogue lecture. This was also the first public appearance by Thomas since returning from Tibet to the US at LaGuardia airport.
100 Classified Ad. Chicago Daily Tribune, (October 15, 1950): G1. A typical advertisement for the Tibet lecture merely announced the title, time, and place. “Lowell Thomas to Give Lecture on Tibet Tour.” The Washington Post. (January 7, 1950). Most articles reporting on the lecture did little more than announce the lecture was about to take place or gave a staid account of the lecture.
101 Tibet, Script for lecture film, 1950. “Out of This World” lecture script, Box 472, Folder 12, LTP.
It is an ironic start to a lecture crafted by two men who had spent so much time and energy trying to convince the US government to come to the aid of Tibet just a few months prior to the start of the lecture tour. The language the Thomases used is even more puzzling considering they believed public support would sway Congress to help Tibet. The Cold War and the spread of communism were the two main themes used in their campaign to convince the American public to support Tibet and yet the introduction to their lecture immediately dismissed both from the minds of their audience members. This introduction, perhaps more than anything else, demonstrated the dichotomy between how the Thomases presented their Tibet story to the US government and the American public.

It is not entirely clear which Thomas initially took the lead in writing the scripts for the Tibet lectures; however, an interesting trend appears to emerge in the ones that have survived. The five existing scripts range in dates from 1950 to 1959, and unfortunately the Thomases, on all but one of them, noted only years. Lowell, Sr. apparently wrote what appears to be the earliest script. Thomas certainly opened the lecture, because he refers to his son being in Persia shortly before travelling to Calcutta to begin preparations for their trip on the second page of the script. The three other scripts clearly indicate that they were written by Lowell, Jr. and they have a much more restrained tone throughout the narrative. There are still elements of the fantastic included in the script, but it appears that Lowell, Jr. diverged slightly from his father’s approach and found his own voice. Thomas was still a significant part of the show, appearing in-person or at least as a constant figure in the motion picture film and narrative. However,

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102 Tibet, Script for lecture film, 1950. “Out of This World” lecture script, Box 472, Folder 12, LTP. A heavily edited script written in Thomas’s hand (and with his signature green ink), included a note at the top of the first page stating “Hold at home for LJ [Lowell, Jr.].” “L.T. ‘Out of This World,’ Original & Corrected Copy” was also written on the outside of the envelope.

103 Lowell Thomas, Jr. Collection. Unprocessed collection held at the Marist College Archives and Special Collections. Letter from Dad [Lowell Thomas] to Sonny [Lowell Thomas, Jr.], 07 March 1950. Thomas was also
Lowell, Jr. focused much more on the battle between the communist-hating Tibetans and the “Red Tide” that was about to overwhelm (or depending on when the lecture was given - had already overwhelmed) Tibet. Lowell, Jr.’s narrative seemed to be designed to try to cultivate empathy for Tibetans from his American audiences. After the 1950s, he presented his Tibet lecture less and less often, but he did continue to give it upon request for various organizations for approximately another four decades.

An element of the travelogue that seems likely to have been arranged by Thomas was the man hired as the producer of the lecture tour: Michael Todd. Todd an American film and stage producer, who began his career in the entertainment industry as a carnival barker, was “bringing his own brand of showmanship and excitement to the lecture field.” Todd created a promotional booklet for the lecture tour that included a biography of Lowell, Jr. and accolades for the show from a variety of luminaries, including: Edwin C. Hill, newsman and director of newsreels; Quentin Reynolds, war correspondent and author; Roy Chapman Andrews, explorer and leader of Gobi desert expeditions; and James Hilton, the author of “Lost Horizon.” All four of these men shared various characteristics of Thomas’s own personality. They represented apparently a constant figure behind the scenes as well. He wrote a four-page letter to his son criticizing his lecturing technique and offering several suggestions concerning how to improve his performance.

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104 Tibet, Script for lecture film, 1950. “Out of This World” lecture scripts, Box 472, Folder 12; Box 472, Folder 12; Box 473, Folder 1, LTP. Copies of Lowell Thomas, Jr.’s 1959 “Out of This World” lecture script are held in the Lowell Thomas, Jr. Collection in the Marist College Archives and Special Collections. This collection is currently being cataloged and does not have a complete finding aid. There was not any record of tension developing between father and son concerning how they presented their Tibet story. Earlier, Thomas had encouraged his son to write the book version of their adventure and he apparently was satisfied to have his son also take the lead on the lecture tour.

105 An email exchange with Anne Thomas Donaghy. Lowell Thomas, Jr.’s daughter confirmed that her father presented different versions of his Tibet lecture until approximately 2001.

106 Tibet, Promotional booklets: Michael Todd presents Lowell Thomas, Jr. (in person) in Out of This World: A Journey to Lhasa, Tibet, circa 1950, Box 473, Folder 2, LTP. 

107 Ibid.; Lowell Thomas, Jr. Collection. Unprocessed collection held in the Marist Archives and Special Collections. Notes written by Michael Todd, undated. Todd wrote four pages of handwritten notes suggesting changes and edits to an “Out of This World” script. All his suggestions were to make the lecture more sensational. The following are just a few examples: “Birth rate decreasing – because of no statistics, no census taken, they’ll never know when they’ll run out of people.” When Todd referred to a Tibetan woman’s expensive garments he noted: “Women’s costly dresses – “You husband[s] might think of that when the little woman is buying an Easter dress!”
the aspects of his career that Thomas valued the most, so it is hard to imagine that he did not have a hand in this facet of the lecture tour.

Thomas and Lowell, Jr. produced a film, “Expedition to Lhasa,” which was intended to air on CBS in 1950, but was not broadcast until four years later and was renamed “Out of This World.”\(^\text{108}\) Apparently the lecture tour was doing so well that Thomas did not want his son to lose audience members by airing a made-for-television version of Lowell, Jr.’s lecture. Then they both became involved in the production of Thomas’s early Cinerama films, further delaying the release of their Tibet film. Finally in 1954, their feature length film with a familiar name was released.\(^\text{109}\) Using the same title as the Collier’s article, lecture series, and the book was undoubtedly intended to play on the success of these three highly successful endeavors. The film opened in theaters across the country in 1954, starting in New York in the spring and reaching the west coast by winter.\(^\text{110}\) Newspaper articles described the film as a feature length documentary and there was very little hyperbole used by the reviewers. A New York Times review described the film as “captivating” and “more of an ethnological record than it is a contemporary document” because five years had passed since they made their journey to Lhasa and “Tibet has been taken by the Chinese Communists and its borders have been rigidly closed.”\(^\text{111}\)

A few more years went by before the Thomases returned to their 1949 Tibet 16mm footage to produce yet another film. On February 25, 1958, the fourth episode of the “High

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\(^\text{109}\) Tibet, Guild Theater, 16 April 1954, Box 471, Folder 6, LTP. This source consists of the text of an article written by Lowell Thomas detailing new film and explaining why it was not released earlier.

\(^\text{110}\) “Of Local Origin.” New York Times (April 15, 1954): 35. This article noted that the film opened at the Guild Theater; “Lowell Thomas, Son Visit Sacred Tibet.” Los Angeles Times, (December 23, 1954): 16. This article noted the film “will have its Pacific Coast premiere at the Sunset Theater on Christmas day.”

Adventure with Lowell Thomas’ television series aired on CBS. The episode was entitled “Tibet” and it was the last major film production the Thomases would create concerning their Tibet trip. Not surprisingly Thomas took the reins in his television show, but Lowell, Jr. was heavily featured in the film. He took turns at the narration with his father and was given equal credit for directing the film. The narration was written in Thomas’s familiar style and the film featured the people he met during his journey. There were many light-hearted jokes about their experiences and various aspects of Tibetan culture that Americans in 1958 might have found unusual, however a major point of the television show was to paint a picture of good versus evil. Thomas told his audience about the “exceedingly religious” and “peace-loving” Tibetans he met and how their country was overrun by the “red tide.” The “Chinese communists, who deny even the existence of a Supreme Being” were discussed at the beginning and end of his show.

Thomas concluded the episode by asking:

But what about Tibet and its future? Will those freedom-loving people ever regain their freedom? Will Tibet retain its out of this world charm? Questions difficult to answer. But there is hope. Word has been filtering through the Himalayas telling of a war that has been going on for over a year. The Chinese Reds finding it difficult to communize the Tibetans. Fervently do we hope that the Tibetans some day will regain control of their own destiny.

Thomas was still trying to garner support for Tibetans almost a decade after he promised members of the Tibetan government he would try to bring the American people to their cause. Lowell, Jr. would continue to raise Western awareness to Tibet’s history through film well into

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112 “Tibet – TV High Adventure Series, No. IV.” Script from the “Tibet” television episode, dated February 1958. This script is part of the Lowell Thomas, Jr. Collection held in the Marist College Archives and Special Collections. The collection is currently uncataloged and there is no finding aid. “Webpost, Lowell Thomas, High Adventure Photos.” http://webpost.atwebpages.com/Thomas/photos.htm, accessed on 20 August 2015. This website included air dates for all the “High Adventure with Lowell Thomas” television series. “High Adventure with Lowell Thomas” consisted of ten episodes that aired on CBS from 1957 to 1959.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.
the twenty-first century. As late as 2006, he narrated the documentary “Tibet Hope,” which was produced by William Bacon III and Brad Swenson. The film chronicles the efforts of Tibetans to survive the Chinese invasion and occupation of their homeland.

Thomas acted on every suggestion he made to the Tibetan government and was committed to the Tibetan’s cause until his death in 1981. However, Thomases’ efforts to raise awareness of Americans to the plight of Tibetans had mixed results. While very popular, their activities did not have the results they had hoped to achieve. The Thomases presented the grim facts of an imminent invasion by China to reunite Tibet with the motherland to the White House, but what they presented to the American public did little to dispel the image of Tibet as Shangri-La in Western minds and did even less to convince America that Tibetans needed help any more than one of James Hilton’s characters from Lost Horizon.

The Thomases’ descriptions of Tibet in their writings, lectures, films, and broadcasts consistently presented their journey as a trip to a dream-world or as a living fairytale. The Thomases gave serious reports of what was happening, but they also presented Tibet to American audiences in a purely diverting way. The entertainment value overshadowed the serious reports, ultimately hindering the Thomases’ efforts to help Tibetans. On the other hand, the Thomases were constantly keeping Tibet and Tibetans in the minds of Americans. When Mao Zedong declared the founding of the People’s Republic of China in the fall of 1949, the Thomases were already talking extensively about Tibet on the radio. By the time the PRC army had invaded Tibet in October of 1950 the Thomases had already published several articles, written a book, and started an extensive lecture tour concerning Tibet. From the start of 1951

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when the Tibetan army had been overwhelmed by the Chinese incursion forces, to the 1959
Tibetan Uprising, the Thomases had continued their lectures, produced multiple films, articles,
and another book about Tibet.

The Thomases had been consistently keeping Tibet on the mind of America through their
work. Thomas reported on his news program that the US government supported the Dalai
Lama’s rejection of the Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet ending
Tibet’s political independence and encouraged him to go into exile, in the hope that this would
generate an Asian Buddhist rejection of communism in China which would be consistent with
the US containment policy. However, the Dalai Lama determined the best course of action
was to return to Lhasa. Thomas also kept America aware of the radical reforms Mao’s
government made in Tibet from 1952 to 1959, including aggressive prosecution of Tibetan
officials who rebelled against the Chinese occupying forces. The Thomases efforts may have
done little to inspire Americans to immediately support Tibet, but it can be argued that all of
their efforts had a cumulative effect on the American conscience. No two people had done more
than the Thomases to keep Tibet in the minds of Americans during 1949, the 1950s, and 1960s,
and their work would only become more meaningful as time went on. Lowell Thomas, Sr. and
Jr. were advocating for a free and independent Tibet even before there was a Tibetan
Independence Movement. The next chapter will discuss lesser-known work by the Thomases in
which they attempted to directly aid Tibetan refugees.

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116 Radio Scripts, Lowell Thomas Radio News Broadcast Transcripts [Microfiche], 1 July 1947 – 31 August 1953,
LTP.
Lowell Thomas enjoyed the unique career he had crafted for himself. He never seemed to shy away from public exposure, but there were a few aspects of his life that he did not actively advertise and this included his support of various humanitarian causes and organizations. The Afghanistan Relief Committee, the American Colony in Jerusalem, the American School for Boys in Baghdad, and the Central Relief Committee (India) were just a few of them. He played innumerable roles in each organization as a founder, generous financial supporter, or member of a board of directors. Every organization he supported tended to be in a part of the world that had played a significant role in his life, so it is not surprising that his long interest in Tibet resulted in Thomas investing his time and resources in helping Tibetan refugees.

Tensions between the Tibetans and Chinese continued to escalate during the 1950s. The Dalai Lama’s brother, Guyalo Thondrup, left Tibet to set up an anti-PRC opposition organization in Calcutta and he sought support from the US and Chiang Kai-shek’s Republic of China. The Chinese occupying force continued to tighten its grip by increasing taxation, confiscating weapons, taking private property from Tibetans, and harassing monks. As resistance by Tibetans increased so did Chinese reprisals. Villages were bombed, rebels were executed, and monasteries were destroyed.¹ While Tibet was suffering these atrocities, Thomas was continuing his work as a newsman and reported on world events, such as the July 27, 1953 US armistice

agreement that concluded the Korean War. Three years later the CIA began covert operations to train and equip Tibetan soldiers in guerilla warfare to help in their resistance against the communist Chinese occupation forces from 1956 through 1962. The Tibetan guerillas were trained in Colorado and parachuted back into Tibet to fight a “pinprick” war. The rebels suffered horrendous losses and only succeeded in irritating China but never threatened its control of the region. Ultimately, US support only compounded Tibet’s problems. China used what it perceived as an external threat as an excuse to attack Tibet again in 1959.

On March 10, 1959, tensions broke and a revolt erupted in Lhasa. The Tibetan Uprising was crushed by the PRC military and tens of thousands of Tibetans were killed. The Sera, Ganden, and Drepung monasteries were nearly demolished by artillery, and many other monasteries and temples the Thomases had visited in and around Lhasa were looted and destroyed. Thousands of monks were executed or arrested, and members of the Dalai Lama’s bodyguard who were found in the city were killed along with anyone found with weapons. The Dalai Lama fled Lhasa a week after the start of the uprising and began his government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India.

Just a few weeks after the Tibetan Uprising, Thomas formed the American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees (AECTR) with an impressive group of men, most of whom shared Thomas’s anti-communist point of view. Among them was William O. Douglas, the longest serving Supreme Court Justice in the history of the Court. Douglas was known for his

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2 Radio Scripts, Lowell Thomas Radio News Broadcast Transcripts [Microfiche], 1 July 1947 – 31 August 1953, LTP. For more details also see Kenneth Conboy’s and James Morrison’s The CIA’s Secret War in Tibet (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002).
3 George C. Herring, From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 692.
4 The Tibetan Uprising of 1959 is also known as the 1959 Tibetan Rebellion.
5 Halper and Halper, Tibet: An Unfinished Story, 211-216.
6 “Lowell Thomas Heads Emergency Tibetan Relief Committee: Cable Dalai Lama Offer of Help.” News story prepared for release on April 13, 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.
broad application of First Amendment Rights. He disliked communism because it repressed civil liberties, but he also believed that requiring US citizens to take loyalty oaths was equally repressive.\(^7\) Joseph C. Grew also joined Thomas in forming the AECTR; Grew had served as an Ambassador to Japan, held the position of Under Secretary of State during WWII, and was a long-time American diplomat. Like Thomas and Douglas, he was also concerned about the spread of communism during the Cold War.\(^8\) Minnesota Congressman Walter H. Judd also joined the group. Judd became known nationally due to his crusade “against Chinese Communism” and he “became one of the most influential members of the House [of Representatives] on foreign policy.” In 1981, President Ronald Reagan awarded Judd the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He received the award in part for acting as a “spokesman for all those who cherish liberty.”\(^9\) The only founding member of AECTR that was apparently not actively anti-communist was Dr. Magnus K. Gregersen, who was a physiologist at Columbia University.\(^10\) However, Gregersen did have a vested interest in China. He was on the board of the American Bureau for Medical Aid for China (ABMAC), which was formed during WWII, and he actively recruited medical students from China and other parts of Asia.\(^11\)

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A press release to announce the establishment of the refugee committee was sent to all national papers on April 13, 1959.\(^{12}\) The press release included the text of the cable Thomas sent to the Dalai Lama on behalf of the AECTR:

To express American people’s support of your nation’s struggle for freedom and our deep concern over brutal communist oppression in Tibet we are today launching Emergency Committee to mobilize public support for Tibetan refugee relief. Your personal courage and leadership lights another beacon of hope to all oppressed people. American tradition of standing with people anywhere in world in common struggle for freedom and human decency prompts this action. Please inform us of anything we can do to help.\(^{13}\)

The press release went on to state that the “magnitude of the Tibetan refugee problem is not clearly known” when “this information is at hand, the American Emergency Committee For Tibetan Refugees will immediately mobilize the large-scale public support we know exists. We have no doubt that the American people, steeped in the heritage of aiding all who struggle for freedom no matter where, will respond generously in a program of maximum assistance to the new victims of political oppression in Asia.”\(^{14}\)

The press release appeared in American papers from coast to coast\(^{15}\) and Thomas quickly followed this up by publishing a series of full-page advertisements in the \textit{New York Times} soliciting aid for Tibetan refugees.\(^{16}\) Thomas, in his usual fashion, went to the top to find support for AECTR; he wrote to President Eisenhower and asked him to encourage the Indian

\(^{12}\) “Tibet: Tibetan Relief.” “Lowell Thomas Heads Emergency Tibetan Relief Committee: Cable Dalai Lama Offer of Help,” Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.

\(^{13}\) Ibid. The press release included the full text of the cable sent to the Dalai Lama.

\(^{14}\) Ibid. This statement was attributed to Dr. Magnus I. Gregersen, vice-chairman of the newly organized AECTR.


\(^{16}\) Advertisement. “Flight from Tibet.” \textit{New York Times,} (June 3, 1959): 23. Thomas included “Report No. 1” in his full-page advertisement, which described what the AECTR was doing and intended to do to help Tibetan refugees. He also stated how concerned Americans could contribute to the committee. It also included a message from the Indian Prime Minister encouraging people to support the AECTR’s cause.
Prime Minister Nehru to continue supporting displaced Tibetans. Eisenhower said he would do his best to discuss “the help the Indian government has been giving to the Tibetan refugees.” Thomas also cabled Prime Minister Nehru directly to find out what he could do to help the refugees fleeing into India. He soon started receiving letters from concerned Americans expressing their sympathy for persecuted Tibetans and requesting information about how they could help the cause. The AECTR encouraged Thomas to visit India to see the situation first hand and to meet with India’s leaders to learn more about what they could do to help. Thomas did visit India in 1959 and he met with the Dalai Lama to discuss what could be done for his people.

The AECTR raised funds for medical, educational, and public relations efforts to succor exiled Tibetans and to free Tibet from the PRC government. Thomas was the chairman and a member of the board of directors. Lowell, Jr. was also listed as an AECTR member and member of the board, but his record of participation with AECTR is not as clear as his father’s. The founding of AECTR occurred at approximately the same time he began his career in politics, so that may have limited the time he could commit to the organization (ultimately, he became an Alaskan State Senator and the Lieutenant Governor of Alaska). Thomas, Sr. was actively

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17 President Dwight Eisenhower to Lowell Thomas, 2 December 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. The letter was personally signed by Eisenhower.
18 Cable from Jawaharlal Nehru to Lowell Thomas, 07 May 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Nehru thanks Thomas for his telegram and alerts him to the fact that the Central Relief Committee of India will be getting in touch Thomas as quickly as possible to advise him on the best way he and the AECTR will be able to render help.
19 Don G. Davis to Lowell Thomas, 19 May 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Davis worked at a radio station in Ohio and offered to air messages concerning AECTR for Thomas and asked how he could personally assist the refugees.
20 AECTR Executive Committee Report, 28 May 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. The report announced new corporate members, the approval of a salary for the recently appointed field director, and the recommendation that Thomas visit India.
21 Telegram stating that Thomas had just returned from India after meeting with the Dalai Lama about the Tibetan refugees, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.
22 The AECTR’s original goal was to encourage dissent in Mainland China in an effort to return Chiang Kai-shek and a democratic government to power.
23 American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees, Inc. stationery. The Chairman, Board Members, and Members are listed on the side of the stationery, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.
involved in running the organization and was not merely a figurehead. He received updates, reports, and requests concerning the day-to-day operations of AECTR and used his connections with high-level government officials and celebrities to help bring support to Tibetan refugees.\(^{24}\)

He received correspondence updates concerning funds used by the Dalai Lama to develop his cultural resource center in Dharamsala and arranged for substantial sums of money for medical supplies and food for refugees in Nepal.\(^{25}\) Thomas also made significant contributions to other Tibet relief committees. In a letter to the Tibet Flood Relief Committee he included a heartfelt statement about the impact his trip to Tibet had on his son and himself. “My son, Lowell, Jr. and I have not forgotten the gracious way in which we were received by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tsepon Shakabpa, and the other friendly people in Tibet. That journey was one of the outstanding experiences of our lives, and we look forward to the day when it may be possible once more for us to see some of our Tibetan friends. They are constantly in our thoughts.”\(^{26}\)

Thomas looked for creative ways to raise funding for and to promote the AECTR. In 1937, his popular Parker Brothers board game “Lowell Thomas Travel Game: World Cruise” was released. Thomas believed that he might have similar success by publishing a game he encountered in Tibet. He thought it would be an excellent way “to get nation-wide publicity, and if the game happened to catch fire the financial return would be big” for the AECTR.\(^{27}\) Other members of AECTR suggested a variety of ideas to encourage sympathy for Tibet. One of these

\(^{24}\) Hundreds of documents are included in these folders documenting Thomas’s close involvement with AECTR, Box 158, Folders 7-9, FCP.

\(^{25}\) Memo from B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas concerning the Dalai Lama’s cultural resource center (undated), Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Report from B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas concerning funds budgeted for refugees in Nepal. Dr. B. A. Garside was the Secretary for AECTR.

\(^{26}\) Lowell Thomas to the Tibetan Flood Relief Committee, 6 April 1955, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.

\(^{27}\) Note to Lowell Thomas’s secretary Mary Davis dated 08 June 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Thomas brought back a Tibetan dice game called Sho from his 1949 trip. He contacted Alfred Butts the creator of Scrabble to learn more about the most profitable way to market the game. Thomas considered working with Parker Brothers again or doing it himself. All the proceeds were intended to go to AECTR, but there is no evidence that an American version of Sho ever went into production.
notions was to mount an exhibit of Nicholas Roerich’s Tibet paintings at the Roerich Museum in New York City. The AECTR also sent out periodic telegrams throughout the country to encourage Americans to “[p]lease send your most generous tax deductible contribution to J. Peter Grace, Treasurer, American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees.” Mass mailings were also sent out to solicit donations. One such mailing was timed to arrive at peoples’ homes just before Thanksgiving. The Pfizer International pharmaceutical company donated $350,000 worth of drugs, primarily antibiotics and dietary supplements, to the AECTR, which were shipped to New Delhi in early May of 1959. All of the efforts made by Thomas and members of the AECTR in the few months after the Tibetan Rebellion greatly contributed to refugee relief and the Dalai Lama wrote to Thomas and his son to “express, on behalf of my people, my sincere gratitude and appreciation to you, your colleagues and to all those people who have contributed to Tibetan Relief.”

William Dodge Lewis of Reader’s Digest contacted Thomas suggesting he write an article for the magazine. “The problem of Tibetan Refugees looks like a natural for the Reader’s Digest… Dr. Clarence W. Hall, one of the senior editors, would be interested.” Thomas did write an article entitled “Terror in Tibet,” which appeared in the December 1960 issue, and it

28 AECTR member Charles S. Houston to Lowell Thomas, 19 July 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. The letter from Houston suggested the idea of the art exhibit and thought Thomas would be able to influence the museum to reopen the exhibit.
29 Western Union Telegram, 05 May 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. The telegram provided information about Tibetan refugees and the medical supplies needed to help the sick and injured.
30 Harold L. Oram to Mary Davis, Lowell Thomas’s secretary, 23 November 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. The letter included a draft of the mass mailing requesting aid for AECTR. Oram hoped Thomas would have time to read the letter and make suggestions before the end of the day. AECTR received $31,500 from the Thanksgiving appeal for funds. The total funds received was noted in a letter from B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 25 January 1960.
31 John Western, assistant to the President of Pfizer International, Inc., to Marvin Liebman, Executive Vice-Chair of AECTR, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. The letter suggested the most efficient way to ship the drugs and it concluded by stating “may we wish you Committee all success in its efforts to aid Tibetan refugees from Communist aggression.”
32 Dalai Lama to Lowell Thomas and Lowell Thomas, Jr., 18 August 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. The Dalai Lama also thanked Thomas for sending him a copy of his Tibet film, “It brought back clear memories of my beloved and glorious country.”
33 William Dodge Lewis to Lowell Thomas, 17 June 1959, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.
became a useful tool to solicit funds for the AECTR. Thomas remained committed to the committee and continued to raise funds for the refugees. He received a grant from *Time* magazine in 1959 and he wrote to *Time* again in 1961 requesting another grant to help alleviate the suffering of the Tibetan exiles “struggling through snow-filled mountain passes, trying desperately to elude ruthless Communist border guards.” In the summer of 1961, Washington, DC also became interested in Thomas’s AECTR work and invited him to speak before the Subcommittee on Refugees, but he was already committed to an engagement in California and was not able to appear.

In 1961, the AECTR Executive Committee met to discuss the possible extension of the organization. The original plan was for the committee to stay in operation for three months and exist only as a short-term relief program. However, the number of refugees was far greater than anticipated. The original estimate was that 10,000 refugees would go to the Dalai Lama by the end of 1959, but the number was closer to 18,000, and by 1961 there were 40,000. The Dalai Lama anticipated there would be 100,000 refugees by the end of 1962. The AECTR report also expressed concern over the 20,000 refugees that had fled to Nepal during the past year. The committee was uncertain how much funding would be necessary to establish a permanent organization and many of their appeals were based on their plans as a temporary organization. However, the members of AECTR believed there was much more they could do to continue their efforts of providing medical assistance, nutritional supplements, rehabilitation, and education. The members were concerned that if they disbanded that there would not be enough support from other organizations to fill the void. The Indian government had also expressed its

34 Lowell Thomas to Bernard Barnes of Time, Inc., Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.
35 B. A. Garside to Curtis E. Johnson, Staff Director Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapes, 03 July 1961, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.
appreciation for the work the organization was doing and hoped it would continue. The AECTR decided to carry on with its program at least through the end of 1962. The decision to persist was due in part to the Indian Central Relief Committee working with AECTR to provide leadership in India, alleviating some of the difficulties in dealing with a growing organization. The AECTR soon discovered that funding would be more challenging to find now that it had been operating for three years. A request for a grant renewal from Reader’s Digest was politely declined. The committee faced the same challenge when approaching other corporate sponsors, private individuals, and government agencies.

Thomas’s work with the AECTR had the benefit of keeping him in contact with some of the Tibetans he had met in 1949. In addition to the Dalai Lama, Tsepon Shakabpa sent messages through AECTR members. Thomas started considering the idea of inviting the Dalai Lama to the US towards the end of 1962 and he visited him and Prime Minister Nehru in India that December. The Dalai Lama gave Thomas a specially autographed copy of his book, My Land and My People, for Lowell, Jr., and many of the Tibetans they had met asked after the younger Thomas. Thomas filmed the Dalai Lama and Nehru, and planned to do a one-hour film

36 AECTR Memorandum from B. A. Garside to the Members of Executive Committee, 28 July 1961, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.
37 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 06 March 1962, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP.
38 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 04 April 1962, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. The letter included a copy of the correspondence from Reader’s Digest stating that AECTR would not receive funding.
39 Katherine K. Cantwell to Lowell Thomas, 20 July 1962, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Cantwell wrote to Thomas to let him know she would be delivering a gift to him from Shakabpa.
40 Lowell Thomas to Travis Fletcher, [December 1962], Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Thomas wrote about having the “D.L.” visit America.
41 Lowell Thomas to Mary Davis, 04 December 1962, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Thomas dictated a detailed and enthusiastic letter concerning his recent trip to Dharamsala, stating that it “was a complete success.”
featuring the Tibetan leader, with the intention of highlighting the work that was being done in India to help the refugees, and presumably to further AECTR’s fund-raising efforts.42

Thomas was apparently inspired by his work with the AECTR. He continued to use his influence in the publishing industry to have articles issued to keep Tibetan refugees in the minds of Americans. He helped solicit money from private individuals, corporate sponsors, and government agencies; and he had thousands of letters sent out in his name to try to solicit new donors.43 In 1963, there were reports from the AECTR staff in India that the “Tibetan Refugee problem is getting worse and worse…”44 Two thousand refugees arrived within a few weeks and they were in wretched condition; one had leprosy and hundreds of others were thought to have tuberculosis, and all were poorly clothed and malnourished. Walter Judd and Thomas were expected to present a new emergency appeal to the State Department and discuss the status of a $50,000 grant the AECTR had expected to receive from Washington the previous year. Thomas called for an AECTR board meeting for the following week to discuss the problems at hand.45

42 Lowell Thomas to Katherine Cantwell, Tibetan Relief Committee, 06 December 1962, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Thomas asked Cantwell to do a filmed interview with the Dalai Lama to capture additional footage of him; Letter from [Mary Davis] to Lowell Thomas, 10 December [1962], Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Davis referred to the “one-hour show” Thomas was planning to do of the Dalai Lama. Thomas was keeping a hectic schedule and had more material on Australia and Indonesia. His plans to go to Moscow were canceled, so he decided to travel to Tehran instead. After that he planned to go skiing in Austria, “or wherever they have good early snow”; Travis L. Fletcher to Lowell Thomas, 12 December 1962, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Fletcher described footage of Tibetan refugees he intended to capture.

43 Memorandum from B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas and Dr. Judd, 02 August 1962, Box 158, Folder 7, FCP. Regarding a Reader’s Digest article by Clarence W. Hall that was intended to solicit new donations to AECTR; Letter from B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 20 September 1962, regarding 4,000 letters to be sent out to Tibetan refugee supporters. Each member that made a new donation of $100 or more would receive a personal letter from Thomas.

44 Kit [Katherine Cantwell] to Mary [Davis], 03 January 1963, Folder 158, Folder 8, FCP. In addition to discussing the refugee problem, Cantwell also wrote about the Dalai Lama film project.

45 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 08 January 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. In addition to Garside discussing the refugee situation and the $50,000 grant from the State Department, he asked Thomas to call an AECTR board meeting “to give them a first-hand report on your visit [to India], observations, and recommendations.” Thomas typed a note on the letter asking his secretary to set up a meeting with the AECTR board the following week; B. A. Garside to Abba P. Schwartz, Administrator, Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs, 15 February 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Garside included the total budgets for the first years of operation for AECTR: March 1959 through December 31, 1961 - $784,610; January 1962 through February 15 1963, $96,643; Total - $881,253. The AECTR
By January of 1963, Thomas’s idea for a US tour for the Dalai Lama had turned into an international circuit, and the filmed interview the AECTR staff conducted with the Dalai Lama was said to be “very successful.” He responded in the affirmative when asked if he would be willing to visit the US and other foreign countries. The US Embassy in India also believed it was an ideal time for such a tour; the atmosphere had never been so favorable and perhaps never would be again.

Thomas continued working on raising funds and spoke with a member of the State Department, Abba Schwartz, who was in charge of handling problems concerning refugees; Schwartz appeared interested in helping with the exiles in India. He also was moving forward with his film featuring the Dalai Lama and the AECTR. Elements of the film began to sound as if Thomas was falling into his old habit of entertaining his audiences rather than focusing on the serious issue at hand. One of his AECTR staff members in India reported to Thomas that “the last shots of the mongoose-snake grapple and the wedding have been shipped.” AECTR work continued as thousands of more refugees entered India from Nepal and the Committee for Tibetan Refugee Children was established with the goal of starting as many children’s homes in

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46 Marvin Liebman to Lowell Thomas, 23 January 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Liebman wrote of his interest in Thomas’s idea to organize an international tour for the Dalai Lama.
47 Travis Fletcher, AECTR Field Director, to Lowell Thomas, 20 January 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Fletcher discussed the success of the filming, the favorable responses from the Dalai Lama, and the positive reaction from the US Embassy in India.
48 Ibid. Fletcher discussed the success of the filming, the favorable responses from the Dalai Lama, and the positive reaction from the US Embassy in India.
49 Typed “message” from Lowell Thomas Rockefeller Center Office to Dr. [B. A.] Garside, 15 February 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. The message informed Garside of Schwartz’s interest in supporting Tibetan refugees in India.
50 Travis L. Fletcher to Lowell Thomas, 26 February 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
India as possible. Good news soon arrived from Washington; AECTR’s State Department grant was successful and the organization received $39,100.52

Yet, just when Thomas appeared to be gaining momentum for the AECTR’s efforts he ran into some difficulties. His Executive Vice-Chairman, Dr. B. A. Garside, the man who managed AETCR’s day-to-day activities wrote to Thomas on behalf of Mr. A. Lewis Brookes, the Organizing Secretary of the Tibet Society of the United Kingdom, and the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama and Brookes were “very anxious that we [Thomas and the AECTR] should do all in our power to eradicate any false impressions about the former conditions in Tibet which have been caused by a recent film here [England] on television.” The film, which was taken in occupied Tibet with permission of Chinese authorities, depicted the Tibetan elite oppressing peasants and it suggested that China had liberated them.53 The Tibetan government-in-exile wanted to refute what it believed to be purely Chinese propaganda. Garside asked Thomas about the new Tibet film he was planning and if he would be able to help counter the pro-Chinese movie. Thomas had the regrettable responsibility to send Garside bad news. The footage that was shot of the Dalai Lama, the AECTR performing its work, and refugees in India was made on bad film stock and was unusable. Thomas hoped to re-shoot the film, but he bemoaned this disaster and the fact that it did not look like the Dalai Lama would be willing to do a tour after all.54

51 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 24 July 1963, Box 158, Folder 8. FCP.
52 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 25 June 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Twelve thousand dollars was intended to furnish twenty children’s homes.
53 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 30 July 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. The quote was from a letter sent to Garside from Mr. A. Lewis Brookes, Organizing Secretary of the Tibet Society of the United Kingdom.
54 Lowell Thomas to B. A. Garside, 30 July 1963, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Thomas explained to Garside that the film was ruined due to bad film stock.
Thomas did not let any setbacks the AECTR encountered deter him. He continued with his usual vigor in 1964, sent out letters and quickly raised $41,000,55 and he received a donation of 1,400 c.c. of Gamma Globulin from the pharmaceutical company Merck, Sharp & Dohme.56 However, Thomas was concerned about how long the AECTR would be able to rely on appeals by mail and personal contributions. It cost approximately $60,000 a year to keep the operation running and it depended heavily on support from foundations and the State Department. Garside suggested focusing more on foundation support and apparently Thomas had resurrected his idea for a “motion picture for television based on the Tibetan refugees,” which met with “hearty approval” from the committee.57 It was suggested that Thomas could capture new footage in conjunction with a trip to Nepal for the coronation of the King.58

As a well-known celebrity, Thomas received frequent requests for favors and being the chairman of AECTR led to even more of these entreaties. The most notable of these appeals came from Tsepon Shakabpa. Shakabpa asked Thomas for a $10,000 loan to help get his book Tibet: A Political History published.59 It is unclear if Thomas gave Shakabpa the money, but his book was published just a few months later.60 A few weeks after the request for the loan, Shakabpa asked Thomas to help his youngest son, who was attending Adelphi University, and his son’s friend find summer jobs.61 Shakabpa was in the US for an extended stay to complete his book, and Thomas hosted a farewell party for him and his wife before they returned to

55 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 20 January 1964, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Garside wrote about the success of the last letter campaign and plans for the next one.
56 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 19 August 1964, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Garside was very pleased to receive the “very expensive and hard-to-get Gamma Globulin.”
57 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 17 September 1964, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
58 Travis L. Fletcher to Lowell Thomas, 08 March 1965, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
59 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 30 October 1964, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Garside discussed Shakabpa’s direct request to Thomas for a $10,000 loan. Apparently Thomas asked Garside if there was anything the AECTR could do to help with the situation.
60 Press release announcing the publication of Tibet: A Political History, 26 February 1965, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
61 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 18 March 1965, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
Shakabpa’s request helps demonstrate that Thomas’s relationship with the Tibetan community was significant. He came to mean more to the Tibetans than a source of monetary assistance for refugees. Thomas may not have had success convincing the US government to come to the aid of Tibet before China invaded, but Tibetans had discovered that he did have the ability to keep Tibet in the minds of Americans. Shakabpa apparently learned from Thomas – and understood the value of telling Tibet’s story in his own words.

By 1965, the AECTR believed that the emergency stage of its program was completed. The committee estimated that there were approximately 50,000 Tibetan refugees in India and hundreds were still arriving every month, but the major influxes seemed to be over. Walter Judd was determined to make education a greater priority and the Dalai Lama apparently agreed. Judd believed that Tibetans had two problems, “how to retain the old, and at the same time learn the new…” Raising funds was a growing issue for the AECTR staff, but in 1965 they received their largest grants to date; the committee received a total of $312,100 from government agencies, which they believed would be adequate for the program year.

By 1966, the AECTR had accomplished the following: four fully staffed and equipped hospitals with an average of 500 Tibetans treated a day; mobile medical services capable of serving 6,000 Tibetan refugees in remote areas of north India; a sanatorium for Tibetan children with tuberculosis; and a home for elderly or infirmed Tibetan refugees, with facilities for occupational therapy. They also provided: assistance to six Tibetan schools which

62 Ibid.
63 Thomas’s willingness to help Shakabpa and his son was not surprising. Thomas enjoyed helping those he considered his friends, even if the feeling was not entirely mutual.
64 Walter H. Judd to Lowell Thomas, 02 March 1965, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Judd described his most recent visit to India and a meeting with the Dalai Lama. He also laid out plans to increase ACTER’s ability to help educate Tibetan refugees.
65 Report of Executive Vice Chairman to AECTR Executive Committee, 16 June 1965, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. The report discussed activities in India and New York, and included a summary of receipts and disbursements.
accommodated more than 4,000 students; scholarships in private schools for forty outstanding
Tibetan children; vocational training and individual rehabilitation assistance for more than 1,000
Tibetans; livestock, tractors, and other agricultural equipment to help Tibetans support
themselves in agricultural settlements throughout India; medical and other relief supplies; and
another mobile medical unit with staff and an ambulance, for the Tibetan refugees in Sikkim.66

Young Tibetan refugees were sent to US universities to learn skills that would be helpful
to the Dalai Lama. In one instance several Tibetans were given scholarships to Cornell
University so they could major in business administration. The Dalai Lama planned to construct
a steel pipe factory near Calcutta in the hope of generating revenue in India.67 He also sent a
personal letter requesting help to try to obtain permission to establish a settlement of Tibetan
exiles in the US. President Johnson informed the Dalai Lama that it “would be very difficult to
obtain funds for such a scheme from the US Government, as this would require a special
sanction from Congress…”68 He was not asking Thomas to intervene with the US government,
but he hoped that he would be able to help him establish the US settlement. Thomas
immediately sent out a note to Lowell, Jr., Garside, Judd, Ilya Tolstoy, and Burt Todd (an
adventurer and entrepreneur) asking for ideas.69

The plan of making a film about the Tibetan refugees to help raise funds for the AECTR
came up again in the spring of 1966. Garside still believed the development of a one-hour
television program would be an excellent opportunity for the organization. He drafted a rough

66 Travis L. Fletcher to Lowell Thomas, 09 September 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Fletcher’s letter summarized
AECTR’s accomplishments since 1959.
67 Travis L. Fletcher to Lowell Thomas, 01 September 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Fletcher discussed Tibetans
preparing to attend Dartmouth University and Cornell University.
68 Dalai Lama to Lowell Thomas, 27 January 1967, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. The Dalai Lama also asked Thomas to
pass along his best wishes to Lowell, Jr.
69 Letter from Lowell Thomas to Lowell, Jr., Dr. Garside, Dr. Judd, Ilya Tolstoy, and Burt Todd, 27 January 1967,
Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. He suggested areas in Colorado, California, and Montana as possible sites for a new
Tibetan homeland.
outline for the movie and suggested using footage from a documentary produced by the British and American Councils of Churches on Tibetan refugees. Others were interested in having Thomas produce a Tibet film as well. T. T. Liushar, the Permanent Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, wrote to Thomas requesting copies of any motion pictures or photographs he might have of Tibet or Tibetan refugees. No explanation was given, but the request was presumably on behalf of the Tibetan cultural center in Dharamsala. The AECTR director, Travis Fletcher, was also attempting to pressure Thomas into committing to a documentary. He thought it would be an excellent way to highlight the work the AECTR had been doing for the past several years and he thought it would be financially beneficial to the organization. Fletcher planned to have the Dalai Lama’s brother, Gyalo Thondup, talk to Thomas about this during Thondup’s next trip to the US. Thomas responded months later, agreeing that there was footage available to make a film featuring the Tibetan refugees, but that it was not possible for him to distribute a motion picture at the moment. He was apparently tied into contracts or previous commitments with Odyssey Films and the British Broadcasting Corporation, and neither company was interested in allowing Thomas to distribute any motion picture films they did not have slated for production.

The AECTR was still trying to help coordinate an international tour by the Dalai Lama in 1966 and the organization appeared to be making headway again. The Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, was in favor of the idea and the AECTR hoped to have the Dalai Lama present his story before the United Nations. The biggest stumbling block was funding the event and Garside was politely pressuring Thomas to step in to help secure money from “the key foundations with

70 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 23 March 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
71 T. T. Liushar, Permanent Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to Lowell Thomas, 05 May 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
72 Letter from Travis L. Fletcher to Lowell Thomas, 17 June 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
73 Lowell Thomas to B. A. Garside, 03 November 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
which you are familiar.”74 There was another concern facing the refugee organization as well. The AECTR wanted the State Department to handle the Dalai Lama’s trip to the US, but it was unlikely the State Department would assume this role due to possible international political repercussions, particularly from China. The AECTR did not want to undertake this role either, due to possible financial, political, and logistical complications.75 In spite of the foreseen difficulties of the Dalai Lama visiting the US, the AECTR continued to pursue the possibility. Gyalo Thondup stated that the Dalai Lama was “eager to make the trip, visiting Buddhist countries first, then the United States with an official appearance before the U.N. General Assembly.” The Indian government had given its approval for the trip, and much to the relief of the AECTR staff, it was also apparently prepared to fund the trip. The AECTR wanted to confirm the trip with the State Department and Garside suggested that Lowell, Jr. coordinate the Dalai Lama’s US visit if he was able to take the time needed to handle the arrangements.76 The Dalai Lama made his first visits abroad since going into exile, traveling to Japan and Thailand, in March of 1967. Due to political tensions, however, he did not travel to the US or any other Western countries.77

The first several months of 1966 proved to be difficult financially for the AECTR. The organization was receiving smaller and smaller contributions from individuals and foundation money was becoming less and less dependable. The Reader’s Digest had been a frequent supporter of the AECTR since 1959, but even it and other organizations that Thomas had close ties with were balking at the prospect of writing another check to the committee. Many donors knew that the AECTR’s original intention was to operate for a year or less to help establish

74 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 01 June 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
75 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 08 June 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
76 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 05 August 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
77 “Lok Sabha Questions Facilities for Dalai Lama to Go Abroad,” The Statesman, (20 March 1967): n.p. The article discussed the political tension caused in India by the Dalai Lama traveling abroad.
Tibetan refugees in a new location. Committee members slowly realized the process of refugee support was not a simple one, and to their credit they had continued to extend AECTR’s support year after year. But several regular sponsors of the AECTR saw no end to the “temporary” aid they were offering and apparently they decided past donations were enough. The situation became dire and Garside drafted a plan to scale back operations with the intent of disbanding the organization.\(^{78}\) It took direct intervention by Thomas to secure additional funding from the \textit{Reader’s Digest Association}. He was apparently very persuasive, because not only did the AECTR receive a donation from \textit{Reader’s Digest}, it also received two additional gifts from DeWitt Wallace and his wife.\(^{79}\) A few months after receiving funds from the Wallaces, the Pew Memorial Fund donated $10,000 and a grant application to the Lilly Endowment for $15,000 was successful.\(^{80}\) Private donations in the amount of $3,000 came in after Thomas sent out another appeal through the mail and committee members contributed over $2,500 with more money pledged for the following year. The organization was trying to raise $95,000 to “wind up this undertaking in satisfactory fashion.”\(^{81}\) The continuation of the AECTR was a relief to members of the Indian Parliament. The Indian government believed that the rehabilitation of the Tibetan refugees was nearing its completion and “that it would be undesirable to stop short of completing our job.”\(^{82}\) Thomas began receiving letters of concern from various people and

\(^{78}\) B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 15 June 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Garside included a draft report to AECTR directors detailing how AECTR would prepare to disband.

\(^{79}\) B. A. Garside to Mr. DeWitt Wallace, Co-Founder of \textit{Reader’s Digest}, 27 June 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Garside indicated that AECTR received three separate gifts from Wallace, his wife, and the \textit{Reader’s Digest Association}.

\(^{80}\) Letter from B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 27 September 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Garside confirmed the receipt of $10,000 from the Pew Memorial Fund; B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 31 October 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Garside confirmed the receipt of $15,000 from the Lilly Endowment.

\(^{81}\) B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 27 September 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.

\(^{82}\) J. B. Kripalani to Lowell Thomas, 07 September 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Kripalani was a long-serving political leader in India. He was a member of the Praja Socialist Party and he was elected as the member of the Lok Sabha for four times, in 1952, 1957, 1963 and 1967. Interestingly, Kripalani referred to the refugees as being something of a burden, which may have been part of motivation for writing to Thomas to encourage him to keep the AECTR going.
agencies that had become dependent on AECTR support, but he thought it was reaching the limit of its ability to raise funds and did not foresee any possibility of the organization continuing. Apparently Thomas explained this to donors, so it was understood that they were making a final contribution to the AECTR.

By 1966, Thomas was viewed as America’s expert on Tibet. Hugh Richardson wrote to Thomas in 1963 asking him for help in making David Snellgrove’s (the noted British Tibetologist) idea of setting up a Tibetan cultural center in London a reality. Richardson and Snellgrove believed it was critical for Tibetans to “learn the western approach to thinking so that they could apply new standards – as indeed they must – to their own religion, history and culture as a whole.” An article printed in the New York Times on July 5, 1966 entitled “Chinese Tighten Control Over Tibet,” by Harrison Salisbury was riddled with errors leading readers to believe Chinese control in Tibet was not nearly as severe as had been previously reported.

Sam Pryor, Vice-President of Pan American World Airways and Lowell, Jr.’s father-in-law, had a rebuttal letter to the editor drafted for Thomas or Lowell, Jr. to submit to the New York Times. There is no evidence that the letter was ever published by the Times. Thomas was also asked to give his advice and prestige in aid of other organizations intended to help Tibetans. The Tibet Foundation and wrote to Thomas concerning Tibetan orphans and what would happen to them without AECTR support. This letter was just one example of many that Thomas received.

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83 Mrs. R. D. Taring to Lowell Thomas, 16 March 1967, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Taring worked with the Tibet Foundation and wrote to Thomas concerning Tibetan orphans and what would happen to them without AECTR support. This letter was just one example of many that Thomas received.

84 Lowell Thomas to Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, 05 June 1968, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Thomas explained that the AECTR was intended to be temporary and that over the years it became increasingly difficult to raise funds.

85 Letter from Hugh [Richardson] to Lowell Thomas, 26 November 1963, Box 482, Folder 3, FCP. The film was taken in occupied Tibet with permission of the Chinese authorities.

86 Harrison E. Salisbury, “Chinese Tighten Control Over Tibet.” New York Times, (July 5, 1966): 5. It is a curious article that by no means excuses the Chinese for any of their brutal methods in Tibet, but it does provide misleading information about the number of refugees fleeing Tibet, how the Chinese separated children from families to indoctrinate them into the communist regime, and how many monasteries were destroyed. It is possibly the result of poor journalism on Harrison’s part or a subtle attempt by China to make their methods appear less brutal, or both.

87 Draft of a Letter to the Editor written for Lowell Thomas or Lowell Thomas, Jr. by Charles Haefelfinger, Secretary to Samuel F. Pryor, 13 July 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Samuel Pryor was vice-president of Pan American World Airways in the early 1960s and was Lowell, Jr.’s father-in-law.

88 A search on ProQuest’s New York Times – Historical Newspapers database did not retrieve any results for the “Letter to the Editor” Charles Haefelfinger had drafted. (Search conducted on 25 August 2015).
Society, Inc. requested Thomas’s help in establishing their organization and invited him to be a charter member. Thubten Jigme Norbu to Lowell Thomas, 25 October 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Norbu was the Abbott of the Kumbum Monastery before the 1949 invasion. He fled to India in 1959 and he later moved to the US where he was instrumental in setting up the Tibetan studies programs at the Museum of Natural History and Indiana University. Thomas agreed to be a member of the Board of Directors and Norbu asked Thomas to write an article for the Tibet Society’s newsletter; Thubten Jigme Norbu to Lowell Thomas, 07 February 1967.

89 Time magazine requested an article concerning the current conditions in Tibet for a March 1967 issue. Garside took the liberty of drafting an article for Thomas that he hoped would be just as useful for AECTR fund raising, as was his 1960 “Terror in Tibet” article. This Week magazine also requested an article from Thomas, and the AECTR planned to send reprints to members to try to boost donations. Thomas donated the $1,000 he received for writing the article to the committee.

The American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees, Inc. decided to officially terminate its program in India on December 31, 1967. Committee members believed it had largely succeeded in its mission to help Tibetan refugees and it was not prepared to contend with the fund raising and staffing challenges it would face if the AECTR continued its operations. When the organization was established in 1959, its by-laws stated that the AECTR would not be active for more than three months and then it “would turn over all of its responsibilities to the more permanent humanitarian agencies in India.” During 1968 the AECTR worked with the US and Indian governments to ensure the hospitals the organization built or operated would stay open at least through the rest of the year. The committee continued to fund the care and education of approximately twenty Tibetan students for the year, and the executive committee

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89 Thubten Jigme Norbu to Lowell Thomas, 25 October 1966, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
90 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 11 January 1967, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
91 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 16 March 1967, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
92 B. A. Garside to Mrs. Audye Reynolds Tuttle, 23 May 1968, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Tuttle was one of the many supporters that contacted AECTR asking how the Tibetans would be cared for, especially the children, if AECTR was not there to support them. Garside explained AECTR’s mission and by-laws in an effort to assure her AECTR’s work would be continued by others.
generally made sure it had met all of its obligations in India. The Indian Central Relief Committee and the Catholic Relief Services took over the few projects the AECTR would not be able to complete. A few weeks later Garside sent Thomas what should have been his last official communication as the Executive Vice Chairman of the AECTR. Thomas did not attend the Executive Committee meeting, so Garside shared the four main points that were discussed. Many people, including Tibetans, Indian civilian and government leaders, and members of the US Department of State’s Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs, believed the AECTR should continue its work. There was a strong belief that the organization could still find many useful ways to continue to help Tibetan refugees. The committee recognized that the AECTR had completed all of the original tasks it undertook and its sources of support were largely exhausted. However, there appeared to be a source of funds that could be made available to the AECTR to “meet such needs as may still exist among present and potential Tibetan refugees.” The funding consisted of several million dollars raised by a 1966 European campaign for refugees, US government grants, Indian government funds, and money from private organizations. Walter Judd reported that he had a confidential conversation with the State Department’s Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs, and that office urged “that AECTR be continued as a channel for disbursing available US government funds, both the counterpart funds held in India and possibly other funds which might be made available by the government.” Garside reported that

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93 Memorandum from B. A. Garside to Members of the Executive Committee, 23 May 1968, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. The memo focused on AECTR’s financial position and its remaining obligations. Garside sent a copy of the memo to Thomas with an accompanying letter dated 24 May 1968. Garside noted that he had received many protests for not keeping AECTR going longer, and that they received “little commendation for having kept it going for nine years.”

94 Lowell Thomas to each AECTR Director and Member, 13 April 1970, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Thomas sent this letter out to notify AECTR members and directors of the final dissolution of the organization. He discussed the overall accomplishments of the group and how the organization wrapped up its projects.

95 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 27 December 1968, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.

96 B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 04 December 1968, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.

97 Ibid.
after an extensive discussion of these matters, “the Directors agreed (Res. D14-03) to keep AECTR in existence for a maximum of one year while its officers explored with the Department of State the possibility of securing such support in ways that would be most beneficial to the Tibetans and at the same time would enable AECTR to operate efficiently.”98 Without the specter of fundraising looming over them the executive members of the AECTR were obviously pleased to be able to continue the work they had been doing for almost ten years. However, the experiment was relatively short-lived and the AECTR was officially dissolved on April 10, 1970.99 The AECTR raised $2,431,868 after it was established in 1959 and 90.8% of the funds was expended on services to Tibetan refugees, 6.0% was expended on fundraising, and 3.2% was expended on administration.100

Little has been written about the history of the AECTR, but historian of modern China and Tibet, A. Tom Grunfeld, did include a brief and intriguing entry concerning the organization in his book *The Making of Modern Tibet*. Grunfeld wrote that the AECTR literature attributed the origin of the committee to Magnus I. Gregerson and Marvin Liebman, but he does not go on to explain Thomas’s deep involvement with the organization.101 He also speculated that the CIA provided a major source of AECTR’s funding and that the organization abruptly ended in 1967, “leaving many projects that had relied on the AECTR for funding high and dry.”102 Grunfeld was apparently implying that the AECTR disbanded because of ties to the CIA, but the reality is likely much less dramatic. Based on AECTR records and correspondence, the organization was a privately planned agency that received funding from a variety of organizations, which included

98 Ibid.
99 Certified dissolution of the American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees, Inc., 10 April 1970. Signed by John P. Lomenzo, the New York State Secretary of State, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP.
100 Certified dissolution of the American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees, Inc., 10 April 1970, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP.
101 Magnus I. Gregersen and Marvin Liebman were both on the AECTR Board of Directors.
The US government. The AECTR did not abruptly cease operations in 1967, it dissolved in 1970. The committee spent considerable time planning the cessation of its activities and were concerned about the impact it would have on the refugees. As Garside noted to Thomas, he had received many protests for not keeping the AECTR going longer, and “little commendation for having kept it going for nine years.”103 It is possible the CIA was behind some of the funding for the AECTR, as 44.6% of its direct funds came from the US government. However, approximately half of these funds consisted of the cost of drugs supplied by pharmaceutical companies,104 and it is unclear if the cost of the drugs were underwritten by the US government. Many private and non-profit organizations have relied more heavily on government funding without it implying deeper involvement with Washington. The AECTR may have been concerned that if it continued serving as a conduit for US government funding after 1970, the organization may have been caught in a political imbroglio between the US and China, that would have harmed relief efforts to Tibetan refugees and the work the Dalai Lama was doing in India.

The dissolution of the AECTR was not the end of Thomas’s efforts to help Tibetans. Even before the AECTR officially disbanded he had become a member of the Board of Directors of The Tibetan Foundation.105 He also continued helping Tibetans attend American universities. He contributed to the Tibetan Homes Foundation regularly, one of the organizations that was particularly concerned about how Tibetan children would be impacted by the absence of the AECTR; and he aided in the publication of books concerning Tibet.106 Thomas also contributed

103 Memo from B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, 24 May 1968, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
105 Phintso Thonden, Permanent Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to Lowell Thomas, 12 June 1969, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. Thonden stressed the importance Thomas’s “presence and guidance” to the organization.
106 Tibetan Foundation to Lowell Thomas, 09 March 1970, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. The letter thanked him for talking to the William Morrow and Co. publishers to help get a Tibetan autobiography published. The book title and
half of the cost of construction of the Tibetan Cultural Center and Library (which officially became known as the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives) in Dharamsala.\textsuperscript{107} The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives later asked Thomas to donate his 1949 Tibet photographs to the Archives.\textsuperscript{108} He also stayed in touch with the Dalai Lama and his officials in Dharamsala throughout the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{109} Thomas continued to be contacted by private individuals asking him what could be done to help Tibetans when reports of brutality by China towards Tibetans appeared in the news.\textsuperscript{110} Appeals were still made to the AECTR and Thomas, Judd, Fletcher, and Garside still tried to determine the best ways to help refugees.\textsuperscript{111} Occasional AECTR business would crop up over the next few years due to continued donations, which were redistributed to the Catholic Relief Services or the Central Relief Committee.\textsuperscript{112} Western Michigan University invited Thomas to be the keynote speaker at a conference it organized to launch its Tibetan Studies Program in 1974.\textsuperscript{113} In 1976, Harold L. Oram, the founder and

\textsuperscript{107} Tashidelek of the Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society to T. C. Tara, Private Secretary to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 06 April 1970, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. Thomas offered to donate $40,000 to help with the construction of the Tibetan Cultural Center. However, it was not until 1973 that Thomas finally made the donation.

\textsuperscript{108} Gyastsho Tshering, Director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives to Lowell Thomas, 05 February 1975, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. There is no evidence that Thomas did donate copies of his 1949 Tibet photographs to the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. The original photographs are now part of the Marist College Archives and Special Collections (Poughkeepsie, NY) and all of the photos have been digitized and are freely accessible online (http://library.marist.edu/archives/exploro.html).

\textsuperscript{109} W. G. Kundeling, Kalon of the Kashag, to Lowell Thomas, 17 April 1970, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. Kundeling wrote that the members of the Council of Religious Affairs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama viewed Thomas as a “true and sincere friend of Tibet” and they value his “guidance, advice and help.”

\textsuperscript{110} Lucie Barber to Lowell Thomas, 16 September 1970, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. The letter included a newspaper article entitled “Reds Practicing Genocide: Refugees from Tibet Tell of Mass Purges” by Ernest Weatherall (Daily News Foreign Service).

\textsuperscript{111} Memorandum from B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, Dr. Judd, and Mr. Fletcher, 11 May 1971, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. Garside sent the memo to Thomas, Judd, and Fletcher on AECTR letterhead and requested their advice concerning Tibetan refugees from East Pakistan.

\textsuperscript{112} B. A. Garside to Lowell Thomas, Walter H. Judd, Thomas S. Knight, Jr., Henry Luce III, Shigeru Kaneshiro, and Andrew D. Heineman, 12 July 1973, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. The salutation on the letter read “Dear Ex-AECTRers.” Garside was informing the recipients that $6,500 had been received on behalf of AECTR and that he wanted to give the Central Relief Organization permission to use the funds to help refugees.

\textsuperscript{113} Ted Bank III to Lowell Thomas, 16 January 1974, Box 158, Folder 9, FCP. The goal of the program was to bring Tibetan refugees to the WMU campus for university training and to have them join the WMU faculty and possibly become faculty members at other American universities.
President of the Oram Group, the fundraising organization that focused on humanitarian and environmental causes, invited Thomas to be the chair of a fundraising group to help Tibetans. Oram wrote to Thomas, “I need only say to you that you are without question the only man in the country that would get a response.”\textsuperscript{114} In 1980, the Dalai Lama asked Thomas to say “a few words endorsing” his book \textit{My Land and My People}. He was publishing a new edition of his book “in an effort to promote information on Tibet.”\textsuperscript{115} The Central Tibetan Secretariat Information Office wrote to Thomas in December of 1981, a few months after Lowell Thomas, Sr.’s death, requesting copies of his 1949 photos to help counter “the untruth about the situation in Tibet being churned out by the massive Chinese propaganda machine.”\textsuperscript{116} Lowell, Jr. responded to the letter and enclosed still photographs he took during his 1949 journey to Tibet with his father.\textsuperscript{117}

The AECTR was organized just weeks after the 1959 Tibetan Uprising and ultimately helped tens of thousands of Tibetan refugees. Other refugee organizations became dependent on the AECTR and even the US government found the group to be useful. Like celebrities of today, Lowell Thomas used his fame to promote awareness to what was happening in Tibet, and although the way he approached these efforts with the American public may have been misguided, he did keep Tibet in the minds of Americans for decades. Perhaps the most significant recognition of the efforts made by the Thomases was given by the Dalai Lama in 2005 when he awarded Lowell Thomas, Jr. \textit{The Light of Truth Award}. Lowell, Jr. was

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  \item \textsuperscript{114} Harold L. Oram to Lowell Thomas, 07 December 1975. Box 158, Folder 9, FCP.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} Letter from the Dalai Lama to Lowell Thomas, 08 January 1980, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. The Dalai Lama was planning to run an advertisement in the \textit{New York Times} in the literary section and wanted to use a quote by Thomas in support of his book in the ad.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} Mrs. Dekyi Khedup, Deputy Secretary to Lowell Thomas, 20 December 1981, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} Lowell Thomas, Jr. to Mrs. Dekyi Khedup, 30 December 1981, Box 158, Folder 8, FCP. Thomas died on August 29, 1981. Lowell, Jr. did not explain that his father was dead in his letter, he just wrote that he hoped the photos would help “such a worthy cause.”
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recognized as one of the last Westerners to visit Tibet during the twentieth-century before the 1950 invasion. The photographs, motion picture film, and audio he brought back and used in his and his father’s radio broadcasts, lectures, articles, books, and films “brought Tibet alive for millions of Americans.”\textsuperscript{118} The International Campaign for Tibet had the following to say about Lowell, Jr.’s efforts on behalf of Tibet and Tibetans. “Lowell Thomas Jr. shaped this country’s views of Tibet at a critical time in Tibetan history and is one of the genuine grandfathers of the Tibet movement in America.”\textsuperscript{119} It is hard to imagine that Thomas would not have been proud his son received this honor for the work they did together to help Tibet.

\textsuperscript{118} “Light of Truth Awards,” International Campaign for Tibet, accessed on 30 August 2015 https://www.savetibet.org/about-ict/light-of-truth-awards/. The Light of Truth Award is a human rights established by the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) in 1995. The purpose of the ICT is to promote democracy and human rights for the Tibetan people. The Dalai Lama personally presents the award annually to the recipients. 

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
CONCLUSION

The man who was once described as “a cross between Walter Cronkite and Indiana Jones” died on August 29, 1981, at the age of 89.¹ Lowell Thomas had an eye for the sensational from the start of his career; as the editor of the local Victor, Colorado newspaper he published a story with the headline, “Mayor’s Nephew Shot in Love Nest,” which apparently prompted the mayor to try to hunt Thomas down with gun in hand.² If it would have been possible for him to do so, Thomas would have organized something more extravagant for his funeral, and made it an event filled with “levity” and opportunities “to ham it up,”³ but he would have been pleased that it became something of a media event. It was covered by three national television networks, and was attended by such notables as former President Gerald Ford and First Lady Betty Ford, Vice President George H.W. Bush and Second Lady Barbara Bush, Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig and his wife Patricia Haig, and Senator John Glenn.⁴ The opera star Robert Merrill sang during the service and Rev. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale gave the eulogy. After the funeral, Lowell, Jr. discussed the personal importance of the Tibet experiences he shared with his father during an interview. He described his father’s lifelong desire to reach Tibet and he fondly recalled the time they spent together during that journey. Lowell, Jr. said, “It was probably the first and only time I was with my Dad on a 24-hour basis. My Dad gave me individual attention but it was always with others. Maybe because I was an only child and he loved crowds. I was closest to him in Tibet.”⁵ The Thomases’ work with Tibet and Tibetans was one of the most

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² Ibid. The article appeared in the Victor Daily Record.
⁴ Ibid.; Ansorage, “Remembering Journalism’s Indiana Jones.” The fact that Senator John Glen attended Thomas’s funeral is noted in Ansorage’s article.
significant periods of their lives, but later in his life Lowell, Jr. seemed to have some regrets over the fact they he and his father were not able to do more for Tibetan refugees:

Well, we’ve tried to be helpful, my father was very helpful. At one time actually organizing relief for the Tibetans who had to flee and I’ve done my, my best, too… And I think it’s probably because of the efforts made both by my father and by myself and, and my reporting through the book and, my lectures with my film on Tibet that they, decided to give me this, this award a few years ago and the Dalai Lama was there himself to present it to me, the Light Of Truth Award in Washington, D.C. and I was very honored by that.6

I think my dad was very influential in building up support for the whole Tibetan movement, keep Tibet free and independent. And I’ve helped on that as much as I can, too.7

Lowell Thomas, Sr. was not introspective. When he looked back on the past events of his life, it was to reminisce, not to self-analyze. In 1977, at the age of eighty-five, Thomas visited the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum. He was impressed with his experience at the library, but apparently he only made the trip to view some of the materials relating to his Tibet journey.8 The most significant time this father and son team spent together was in a place they described as like being on another planet, and it was also arguably the most significant chapter in both of their professional lives.

The Thomases were involved with Tibet and the Tibetan people for decades. They personally met with a wide range of Tibetans, and documented their culture through film, photographs, and audio while they visited Tibet during the summer of 1949. Thomas and his son made radio broadcasts, presented lectures, wrote articles and books, and produced films about their experiences in Tibet. Immediately after the Dalai Lama went into exile, Thomas helped

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7 Ibid., 49.
8 Lowell Thomas to J.R. Fuchs of the Truman Library, May 31, 1977, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum. Miscellaneous Historical Documents Collection. MHDC#s 847-876. Box 26, MHDC 864. Thomas asked what happened to the message from the Dalai Lama to President Truman because he wanted to take a look at it again, but there is no record that it was found.
found one of the world’s first Tibetan refugee organizations. The Thomases discussed several ways they could help Tibet with Tibetan officials and made several suggestions to the US government concerning bringing aid to Tibet. They followed through on all of their ideas with varying degrees of success.

A major goal of the Thomases was to sway the American public in order to convince Congress to come to Tibet’s aid. They attempted this in a variety of ways, but with limited results. Travelogues became the main vehicle in the Thomases’ efforts to garner public support for Tibet, and based on the popularity of past Lowell Thomas Travelogues it was not unreasonable to expect them to succeed. By all accounts, the Tibet travelogues he and his son produced were highly entertaining and they did raise awareness of Tibet in the US, which can be seen in the popularity of the Thomases’ books and lectures. However, they never succeeded in encouraging the American public to appeal to Congress to send aid to Tibet.

Initially, the timing of Thomas’s visit to Tibet appeared to be ideal to draw attention to the Tibetans’ plight. During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s the American public began to show an increased interest in Asian and Pacific cultures.\(^9\) However, the Thomases’ efforts to send aid to Tibet via the US government failed because the Truman administration did not want to spark an all-out war in Asia or become responsible for maintaining Tibet’s safety. The US

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\(^9\) The following examples demonstrate the renewed interest in Asian cultures in the US: John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), which documented the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan; Margaret Bourke-White, *Halfway to Freedom: A Report on the New India in the Words and Pictures of Margaret Bourke-White* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1950), provided readers with a photographic history of India; James Michener, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (New York: Random House, 1953), brought the Korean War home to many Americans; Eleanor Roosevelt, *India and the Awakening East* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), described the far-reaching political changes that were occurring in India; the Broadway play *Teahouse of the August Moon* portrayed US occupied Okinawa in 1953; Paul Osborn and Richard Mason, *The World of Suzy Wong*. Richard Quine, dir. (UK: World Enterprises, 1960), film, the movie *The World of Suzy Wong* (1959) starring William Holden portrayed Hong Kong in the mid-20\(^{th}\) century; author and lecturer, Alan Watts, popularized Zen Buddhism in the 1950s and 60s, as did Jack Kerouac and other Beat writers. The Thomases’ *Collier’s* articles and Lowell, Jr.’s book *Out of This World* fit in well with this genre.
became the world’s most powerful nation after WWII, but was keenly aware that Nationalist leaders throughout Asia were in the process of throwing off Western domination. Yet the White House did not believe it could afford to become embroiled in a situation that could lead to an open confrontation with communist China and the USSR.

Thomas and Lowell, Jr. talked to the highest US government officials in the White House, State Department, CIA, and the Air Force in an attempt to develop greater US interests in Tibet. Thomas shared many of the same opinions with the US government concerning Tibet’s political importance to the US; specifically that it would be advantageous to have an influence in the region to undermine communism. In the summer and autumn of 1949, Thomas became a self-appointed diplomat for Tibet and the US. He began a dialogue between the two governments, and initially US support of Tibet did not appear to be out of the realm of possibility. However, amidst failed US efforts to support Tibet and the growing turbulence in Asia, the balance tipped out of Tibet’s favor. Thomas suddenly became much more useful as a source of information to the cold warriors in Washington for another reason. He did not sway the US government to directly support Tibet, but he did provide valuable strategic information to US governmental and military agencies during the early stages of the Korean War. In the end, Thomas became a cold warrior, but he always kept himself on the fringes of this role. When it became clear to Thomas that he would not succeed in convincing the US government to aid Tibet, he recommitted himself to helping the Tibetan people and refocused his energies on trying to persuade the American public to support Tibet.

Ultimately, the Thomases efforts to help Tibetans had mixed results. Their work with the AECTR offered direct support to Tibetans during a critical time, and their lectures, newspaper and journal articles, books, television show, and movies did vastly increase the consciousness of
Americans to Tibet’s situation. *Out of This World* was a best-seller and their broadcasts on CBS radio represented the first voices ever to be recorded in Tibet and aired to an American audience. However, their tactics did not have the results they had hoped to achieve. The Thomases presented the grim facts of an imminent invasion by China to reunite Tibet with the motherland to the White House, but what they presented to the American public did little to dispel the image of Tibet as Shangri-La in Western minds.

Thomas’s strategy to use public support to sway the US government to aid Tibet did not have the results he wanted, but his basic tactic was adopted by the Dalai Lama starting around the time of Thomas’s death. The years following the Tibetan Uprising were disastrous for Tibet’s people and culture. Religious buildings were destroyed, its culture was brutally attacked, and untold numbers of Tibetans were killed. But then, at the beginning of the 1970s, significant changes began to occur. Government policies were moderated throughout China and Tibet, and Mao’s death in 1976 led to further governmental temperance. Beijing publicly acknowledged the harm it had caused Tibet. A small number of foreigners were allowed to visit; a number of Tibetans were appointed to government positions, and refugees were allowed to travel into Tibet to visit family members. The Dalai Lama challenged Beijing to open Tibet to more visitors and the Chinese government did. The Dalai Lama then began tempering his public statements about achieving a free and independent Tibet and talked more about the economic well-being of Tibetans. In 1979, the door opened slightly for the Dalai Lama to renew negotiations with China for his return to Lhasa. After several years of effort, however, the talks with China ultimately failed and the Dalai Lama decided to take a page from Lowell Thomas’s book. The loss of Thomas as an advocate for Tibet in 1981 may have been part of the Dalai Lama’s

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10 Schell, *Virtual Tibet*, 264.
inspiration to change his strategy. While he was attempting to reconcile with China, he had little international support and once negotiations fell apart he realized that he had to develop a new plan to bring support to Tibet and Tibetans. In the 1980s, the Dalai Lama started a campaign to raise awareness of Tibet’s continued oppression by China and win international support on moral grounds. He planned to use his popular support to compel as many countries as he could to help him pressure the Chinese government to be more reasonable during negotiations concerning Tibet. Like Thomas, the Dalai Lama believed that raising public awareness of what was happening in Tibet would be the key to compelling governments around the world to lobby China in support of himself and the Tibetan people who had suffered great cultural and physical losses since the invasion of 1950. However, where Thomas’s campaign for Tibet failed to gain momentum, the Dalai Lama’s efforts burgeoned into the Tibetan Independence Movement we know today.

Ultimately, the Thomases did not bring direct US support to Tibet, but they did significantly raise American public awareness and supported Tibetan refugees through the AECTR. Over the long term, the Thomases played a critical role in the development of the Tibetan Independence Movement. Where almost any other individual would have failed in this effort, Lowell Thomas’s fame, influence, and energy allowed him and his son to keep Tibet in the public eye for decades. The Thomases were calling for a free and independent Tibet before there was an independence movement and they hoped to achieve this through the popular support of the American people. The results of this work were not immediate and perhaps not even intentional by the Thomases, but ultimately it can be argued that their efforts led to what became known as the Tibetan Independence Movement.

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12 Ibid., 333.
The Dalai Lama appreciated the Thomases’ efforts to help Tibetans throughout the years; particularly keeping Tibet in the public eye and the aid that was offered to the refugees via the AECTR. The Thomases obviously felt a personal connection to the Dalai Lama after their 1949 meeting and they showed it in various ways over the years. In 1950, Lowell, Jr. dedicated his book *Out of This World* to His Holiness, The Dalai Lama and the People of Tibet, who “are earnestly praying that God will grant happiness and everlasting peace to all humanity.”\(^{13}\) Then decades later Lowell, Jr. met the Dalai Lama at the University of California at Santa Barbara.\(^{14}\) The Dalai Lama was at the university to give a talk and Lowell, Jr. was invited to the event. He later recalled the occasion: “And when the talk was over and he was meeting people, huge crowd, I came up to him… and said, ‘Your Holiness do you remember when my father and I came to see you in Lassa?’ And he did and he smiled, gave me a big hug and he said, ‘Like another lifetime.’ And indeed it does seem like another lifetime.”\(^{15}\) Thomas would show his continued passion for Tibet twenty-eight years after his 1949 trip, when in 1977, he emphatically responded to a question from George H. W. Bush. Bush inquired if Thomas worked with the US government to help the Tibetans. Thomas responded, “You’re damn right I did. I supported the Tibetans. And I would do it again, too.”\(^{16}\) However, it wouldn’t be until twenty-four years after Lowell Thomas Sr.’s death that either he or his son would receive any significant public recognition of their efforts to help Tibet. When the Dalai Lama awarded Lowell, Jr. the *Light of Truth Award* in 2005, it affirmed that the Thomases helped shape how people viewed Tibet at a crucial time and that they played an essential role in founding the Tibetan Independence

\(^{13}\) *Out of This World* dedication page.

\(^{14}\) Lowell Thomas, Jr. and Lew Freedman. *Lowell Thomas, Jr., Flight to Adventure*, 98.

\(^{15}\) Lowell Thomas, Jr. interview, 13 May 2009, p. 58.

\(^{16}\) Lilley, *China Hands*, 202. Lilley asked Thomas if he had worked with the US government to help the Tibetans at Bush’s request. Bush had stepped down as the eleventh Director of the Central Intelligence Agency in January of 1977.
Movement. The Thomases’ efforts to help Tibet may have been flawed, and they may not have achieved the results they had hoped for, but ultimately they did make a lasting contribution in aiding Tibet and Tibetans.
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