

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

---

*“We passed the wall into Tibet”*

“This is the proudest day of my life and I shall never forget it. We passed the wall into Tibet – which no European had gone through before without opposition.” This exultant message was sent on December 13, 1903 by Colonel Francis Younghusband, the leader of the Tibet Frontier Commission, despatched by the British government in India to bring Tibet to heel. It was written as Younghusband and his officers moved up past Yatung in the Chumbi valley towards the high Tibetan plateau. A stone wall had been built to mark the last boundary and Younghusband was relieved to pass it without incident. This sense of excitement about being first into Tibet continued as the armed diplomatic mission fought its bloody way to Lhasa. As Younghusband stood on the mountain pass looking down into the Tsangpo valley, knowing that he was finally within striking distance of “the Forbidden City,” he felt another strong surge of anticipation: “This is a day to be remembered. Such a beautiful sight it was. Such a labyrinth of mountains, and down in the valley bottom 4000 feet below us numbers of villages with cultivated lands and trees all round.” Once he finally reached Lhasa he was delighted to receive on September 13, 1904 a telegram from the Viceroy of India: “Clear the line. His Majesty the King-Emperor commands me to express to you and all the officers of the Mission his high approval of the admirable manner in which you have brought your difficult Mission to a happy conclusion.”<sup>1</sup>

Younghusband misrepresented the historical record in these vaunting letters to his wife Helen. Many Europeans had entered Tibet before him.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Francis Younghusband to Helen Younghusband, Camp Rinchong, December 13, 1903, Younghusband Papers, MSS. EUR. F197/174, British Library [hereafter BL]; Same to Same, Camp on Yamdok Tso, July 23, 1904, F197/177, BL; Same to Same, with a copy of the Viceroy’s Telegram, Lhasa, September 13, 1904, F197/177, BL.

<sup>2</sup> A useful one-volume summary of exploration in Tibet is provided in John MacGregor, *Tibet. A Chronicle of Exploration* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970). There is a thorough and comprehensive annotated bibliography of Britain’s connections with Tibet

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 2 Journeys to Empire

Jesuit missionaries had traveled into Tibet from India and China in the 1600s. The Capuchins had even succeeded in briefly establishing a mission at Lhasa in the mid-eighteenth century. In the 1790s Tibet closed its borders with India in an attempt to prevent Europeans meddling in their country. Only then did Tibet become for the West the mysterious land beyond the Himalayas, and Lhasa the forbidden city. When Younghusband wrote of entering Tibet by a route no European had used before he was reflecting a post-1790s European fascination with getting into Tibet. As Donald Lopez observes in *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, Tibet became “an object of imperial desire, and the failure of the European powers to dominate Tibet politically only increased European longing, and fed the fantasy of the land beyond the Snowy Range.”<sup>3</sup> By the late nineteenth century “a veritable stampede of Westerners, fired by the tantalizingly incomplete tales of earlier sojourners, had begun to compete to be ‘the first’ to breach its sacred heart.”<sup>4</sup>

Westerners had only a confused understanding of this little-known land. The cover illustration for this book is from a painting by William Alexander, a member of the Royal Academy, who accompanied the Macartney mission to China in 1793. The painting, now held by the Victoria & Albert Museum, is titled “Poo Ta La or Great temple of Fo, near Zehol, Tibet, China.” All readers will notice at once that this is not the Potala in Lhasa, which is now perhaps the most instantly recognizable building in the world. It is the Potala temple at Chengde which was completed by the emperor Qianlong (1735–1796) in 1771 and modeled on the real Potala. It was built, as was the rest of the Chengde summer palace complex in the cool mountains north-east of Beijing, to pay homage to Lamaist Buddhism and to symbolize Manchu imperial claims over Tibet and Mongolia.<sup>5</sup> But as the garbled title suggests, it was conflated in Alexander’s mind, and by many British viewers at the time, with the actual Potala – or at least it was accepted as an exact replica. No one in Britain knew for sure what the Potala, the seat of the Dalai Lamas, looked like. There were no realistic representations to rival Alexander’s finely colored image of the Chengde imitation. To penetrate the Tibet

in Julie G. Marshall, *Britain and Tibet 1765–1947. A Select and Annotated Bibliography of British Relations with Tibet and the Himalayan States including Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La. Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 5–6.

<sup>4</sup> Orville Schell, *Virtual Tibet. Searching for Shangri-La from the Himalayas to Hollywood* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> Philippe Forêt, *Mapping Chengde. The Qing Landscape Enterprise* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), pp. 15, 25, 51, 125.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

mystery the British resorted to sending Indian spies, often disguised as Buddhist pilgrims, north across the mountains.<sup>6</sup>

Being the first to get into Tibet – and to see the Potala at first-hand – became an obsession for European travelers and explorers. Younghusband succumbed to this melodramatic mode of thinking when sharing his excitement with his wife. But his mission was not even the first British one to enter Tibet. An expedition had been despatched across the Himalayas as far back as 1774. That mission had been led by George Bogle, a young servant in the East India Company service, who had entered Tibet from the pass at the head of the Pachu valley about thirty miles to the east of the Chumbi route taken by Younghusband. The two routes came together at the small frontier town of Phari to which Younghusband was headed as he wrote these rousing letters to his wife.

During Bogle's four-month sojourn in Tibet, in the winter and spring of 1774–1775, he participated in a series of friendly meetings with the Third Panchen Lama, Lobsang Palden Yeshe (1738–1780), at Tashilhunpo monastery near Shigatse. The armed diplomatic mission led by Younghusband forced its way into Tibet and, at a ceremony held in the Potala Palace at Lhasa, compelled Tibetan officials to sign a treaty. The first mission took place just as Britain was beginning to establish its empire in India; the second, when British imperial power in India was at its height. When Bogle crossed the Himalayas, the Enlightenment played a significant role in shaping British views of geography and of other peoples and cultures; when Younghusband's invasion took place, a popular imperial ideology modulated British views of the world.

My encounter with the two Tibet missions came in the India Office and Oriental Collections Reading Room (now the Asian and African Reading Room) at the British Library. It was one of those unexpected discoveries that make research in such a rich archive a delightfully rewarding experience. I was reading in the India Office Records about the events of 1903–1904 when I came across a strange incident. Younghusband described a scene in July 1903 at Khamba Dzong, a tiny Tibetan village at the head of a valley just over the Sikkim border. This region was under the administrative authority of the Sixth Panchen Lama, Chokyi Nyima (1883–1937). Urged on by Lhasa, the Panchen Lama sent a delegation to demand that Younghusband dismantle his armed camp and return across the frontier to India. In the course of this meeting Younghusband produced from his baggage a copy of Bogle's narrative describing the 1774 mission (edited and published in 1876 by Sir Clements Markham)

<sup>6</sup> D.J. Waller, *The Pundits. British Exploration of Tibet and Central Asia* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1990).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 4 Journeys to Empire

and flourished the volume in front of the Tibetans. Younghusband told Badula, the chief delegate from the Panchen Lama, that he was following in the friendly footsteps of Bogle. Badula replied that no one at Shigatse had even heard of George Bogle.<sup>7</sup>

This awkward moment of incomprehension about the first official contact between Britain and Tibet back in 1774 surprised me. I wondered what Younghusband was up to. Presumably he claimed a kinship with the Bogle mission because he believed that establishing such a link would provide some reassuring legitimacy to his expedition. In adopting this pose he conveyed the impression that he had embarked on the same kind of peaceful project as Bogle's journey across the mountains. Were these two British missions to Tibet, separated by 130 years, cut from the same cloth? And had Tibetans at Shigatse really forgotten all about the 1774 mission?

Trying to figure out what Younghusband had in mind by yoking himself to the 1774 mission meant following the trail of George Bogle. That trail became even more interesting on a winter afternoon in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow when, working through the Bogle papers, I came across a reference to Bibi Bogle (the lady Bogle), a woman Bogle had apparently married in Bengal. She appeared in the correspondence between Bengal and Scotland because she was still receiving money from Bogle's estate forty years after Bogle himself had died, and the Bogle family lawyers in Glasgow were making pointed enquiries about the pension.<sup>8</sup> Bogle's Indian (or Tibetan) wife and family in Bengal added another intriguing dimension to the story. The possible Tibetan family link has been investigated by Hugh Richardson, the great British

<sup>7</sup> Francis Younghusband to Louis W. Dane, Khamba Jong, July 29, 1903; Diary of Captain O'Connor, Tibet Frontier Mission, Khamba Jong, July 29, 1903 and August 3, 1903, Government of India. Foreign Department. Secret-E. Proceedings, September 1903, Nos. 189–235, Tibet Negotiations, National Archives of India [hereafter NAI]; Younghusband to Helen Younghusband, Khamba Jong, July 30, 1903, Younghusband Collection, MSS. EUR. F197/173; Younghusband to his Father, Khamba Jong, August 2, 1903, Younghusband Collection, MSS. EUR. F197/145, BL. The British always used the form "Khamba Jong." There is still no agreed-upon standard for the transliteration of Tibetan words into English but "Khamba Dzong" is the more common rendering now. "Dzong" means "fort" (although by the 1700s and 1800s many of these forts had fallen into disrepair and had long lost their military function). They often still served as centers for local or regional administration. Since the British used the form "Khamba Jong" that form is retained throughout the text and notes when British sources are cited. It would be tedious and distracting for the reader to change the form every time it comes up. When the British sources are not speaking to us the form "Khamba Dzong" is used.

<sup>8</sup> Colvin Barrett and Company (Calcutta) to Robert Brown (Messrs. Brown and Watson, Glasgow), Calcutta, September 18, 1820, Bogle Papers, Folder George Bogle Miscellaneous [marked 88], Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Tibetologist, who served as the last British and Indian representative in Lhasa in the 1930s and 1940s before the Chinese invasion of 1950. We shall follow Richardson's pioneering detective work in Tibet and Scotland in an attempt to track down the true story of Bogle's mysterious Bengal marriage.

Bogle's putative wife or wives – Tibetan or Indian or both – introduce the fascinating topic of relationships between British men and Indian women during the imperial era. There is a lively debate about sex, marriage, and concubinage in British India. The issues involved lie at the core of colonial encounters in all their cultural and gendered dimensions. William Dalrymple, the highly respected writer and independent scholar, in his evocative writings on this topic, especially *The White Mughals. Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*, depicts the eighteenth century as an era when English and Indians interacted in more mutually respectful ways in sexual and cultural matters than they did in the following century, when more prejudiced attitudes took over. Gyan Prakash, Professor of South Asian Studies at Princeton, and widely admired for his expertise on colonial India, has argued that all these seemingly equal male–female relationships in the 1700s have to be understood in the context of the unwelcome pressure of East India Company power in Bengal which placed all Indians, women and men alike, in subordinate positions.<sup>9</sup> Examining the behavior of Bogle and his friends with respect to Indian (and Tibetan) women – and how things had changed by Younghusband's time – provides illuminating insights into this controversial aspect of empire.

The case of George Bogle raises other big questions about imperialism. Bogle “was a product of the Scottish Enlightenment.”<sup>10</sup> He was also an agent of the British empire. His case presents the opportunity for investigating the relationship between the Enlightenment and empire. This relationship has been a central issue in writings on European imperialism ever since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, one of the seminal books of twentieth-century humanities scholarship, which argued that the West developed stereotyped views of Asian peoples and cultures in the course of justifying their colonial impositions.<sup>11</sup> This book has had an enormous influence on how historians and literature scholars understand the myriad cultural encounters between East and West. The

<sup>9</sup> William Dalrymple, “Plain Tales from British India,” *New York Review of Books*, April 26, 2007, pp. 47–50; Gyan Prakash, “Inevitable Revolutions,” *The Nation*, April 30, 2007, pp. 25–30.

<sup>10</sup> Alastair Lamb, ed., *Bhutan and Tibet. The Travels of George Bogle and Alexander Hamilton 1774–1777* (Hertingfordbury, Hertfordshire: Roxford Books, 2002), vol. I, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 6 Journeys to Empire

word “orientalism” has become almost unavoidable when reading and writing about empires and about Western views of non-Europeans.

An unexpected example of Said’s ubiquitous influence on our understanding of the British empire erupted into public view when the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich opened its permanent gallery on the empire. There was an almighty public row when the exhibition was promoted by a poster of a Jane Austen-like figure sipping tea, with a bowl of sugar on the table at her side. On the floor below her, a black hand stretched in supplication through the hatch of a slave ship. The unmistakable message was that polite society in imperial Britain depended on the cruelty of slave labor.<sup>12</sup> This picturing of the empire was derived from a chapter in Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* which used Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* to argue that polished and enlightened English society benefited from slavery in the empire while generally ignoring its existence. When Fanny Price, the dependent poor relation staying with the family in the comfortable country house of her more refined cousins, dared to raise the topic of slavery there was “a dead silence” at the dinner table. It is only by reading the silences in such iconic sources as Jane Austen’s novels, argued Said, that we can appreciate what the empire wrought within European cultures and how non-British “others” were viewed – or not viewed.<sup>13</sup> The Empire Exhibition controversy over the faceless slave brought out critics of Said but his theories about empire lay at the center of the heated public debate in British newspapers at the time – as they are at the center of many scholarly debates on European imperialism.

But as often happens in scholarship (and in life generally) what was an illuminating conceptual breakthrough has turned into a confining orthodoxy. Said was sophisticated and open-ended in his thinking. Much of the derivative scholarship has promoted a dogmatism which too easily designates the Enlightenment as the protean causal force behind all European empires. By privileging European science and rationalism over other ways of knowing, so the argument runs, the Enlightenment led Europeans to adopt superior, condescending, and prejudiced attitudes to peoples they encountered round the world. This led into the Orientalist mentalities of the nineteenth century which viewed Asian cultures and states (and by extension, all non-European peoples) as stagnant, backward, and exotic in contrast to the energetic, progressive, and normal developments in Europe. Thus, the “Enlightenment project” led to European colonial impositions round the world. Shelley Walia’s *Edward Said and the Writing of History* is a characteristic example of this approach. It is a

<sup>12</sup> “Empire Show Arouses Pride and Prejudice,” *The Guardian*, August 23, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 80–97.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

useful and clearly written book directed at an international audience. Walia sums things up in a matter-of-fact manner (with the suspects identified by capital letters): “the Enlightenment project emphasised Reason and Progress which could only issue forth from the Western mind. Said shows that the Enlightenment ideals of Reason and Progress had a hidden agenda: that of creating a successful imperial practice.”<sup>14</sup>

Such propositions about the Enlightenment and empire have become axiomatic in many scholarly circles round the world, but there have been some challenges to this piece of conventional wisdom. Sankar Muthu’s *Enlightenment Against Empire* has drawn attention to major Enlightenment-era writers (Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant, and Johann Herder) who “attacked the very foundations of imperialism.”<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Pitts in *A Turn to Empire. The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* has noted that many of the key intellectual figures of the late eighteenth century, such as Adam Smith and Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Condorcet, launched “a critical challenge to European conquest and rule.”<sup>16</sup>

On both sides of the debate the issues have been defined by the ideas of major European thinkers. The learned commentaries by J. G. A. Pocock on the connections between eighteenth-century philosophers and European imperial ideologies are an example of how complex and erudite the discussion can become.<sup>17</sup> In the four volumes of his *Barbarism and Religion* series, Pocock traces the intellectual genealogies of historians and philosophers, beginning with an examination of “the Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon” and continuing on with Voltaire, David Hume, William Robertson, and many other greater and lesser stars in the intellectual firmament of eighteenth-century Europe. The title of Pocock’s grand enterprise refers to the “Enlightenment narrative” which eighteenth-century writers thought they were engaged in – the story of Western society’s descent from the bright world of classical antiquity into the darkness of barbarism and religion before emerging into the new dawn of the Renaissance and enlightened civil society of the 1700s.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Shelley Walia, *Edward Said and the Writing of History* (Duxford, Cambridge: Icon Books, 2001), p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 258.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire. The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. IV *Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). Three previous volumes of this *magnum opus* on *Barbarism and Religion* were published by Cambridge between 1999 and 2003.

<sup>18</sup> W. Clark Gilpin, “Enlightened Genealogies of Religion: Edward Gibbon and His Contemporaries,” *The Journal of Religion* 84 (April 2004), p. 257. This is a review article of Pocock’s first three volumes.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 8 Journeys to Empire

According to this view of the course of history, Europe was now interacting with regions of the world where barbarism and religion still persisted in varying degrees of intensity. This encounter between Europe (now seen as enlightened) and the rest of the world captured the imagination of intellectuals in the eighteenth century. Pocock's own narrative is a densely complex one. He agrees with the view that there was not one single Enlightenment but "a plurality of Enlightenments which cannot be appropriately grouped together and unified by the employment of the definite article."<sup>19</sup> As in all his work, Pocock is meticulous in showing the intricate histories of the phrases and concepts behind the speculations and theories of eighteenth-century thinkers. But even Pocock's sympathetic critics admit his books are a challenge. As Robert Booth of the University of Wisconsin kindly put it, Pocock's work "is hardly for the general reader." All his volumes are "magnificently learned" and "knowingly allusive." B. W. Young of Christ Church College, Oxford, admirably sums up Pocock as "an historian's historian . . . [and] not, in any sense, an easy read."<sup>20</sup>

We shall return to some of Pocock's observations later when dealing with Bogle's views on India and Tibet, but my simple point here is that the writings of even such formidable scholars as Pocock offer only one window into understanding the relationship between the Enlightenment and European expansion overseas. It is hard to imagine an agent of the British empire carrying in his intellectual baggage all the subtle understandings of history and philosophy that are featured in Pocock's four volumes, or for that matter, in Sankar Muthu's close study of his three philosophical giants. It is in this context that George Bogle is such a treasure. His view of the world was certainly shaped by the Enlightenment but he was no Gibbon or Voltaire or Diderot. Through him we can see Enlightenment ideas in day-to-day action rather than as they are painstakingly delineated in learned treatises.

These two moments of British imperial contact with Tibet therefore provide a less rarefied but, as we shall see, a revealing perspective on the relationship between the Enlightenment and the British empire. Contrasting the Enlightenment-era Bogle with the Victorian and Edwardian imperialist Younghusband will bring into sharper focus some of the key issues at stake. Was the Enlightenment the source for the exclusionary and destructive aspects of imperial ideologies? Both Bogle and Younghusband wrote extensively about their encounters with Tibet but neither one was

<sup>19</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. I *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon 1737–1764* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 138.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Booth's review of *Barbarism and Religion* vols. I and II, in *American Political Science Review* 94, 2 (2000), p. 451; B. W. Young's review of *Barbarism and Religion* vol. III, in *Albion* 36 (Autumn 2004), pp. 528–529.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

a study-bound thinker. They were merchants, diplomats, and soldiers. Through these two workaday emissaries of empire we can explore the relationship between Enlightenment and empire in more down-to-earth terms. We can understand the way the relationship worked in real historical circumstances rather than in the theories of philosophers.

The northern borderlands of India run along the Himalayas, the highest mountain range in the world. For many Tibetans and Indians much of this mountain landscape is spiritualized by myth and religious belief as the home to gods, demons, and spirits. For many British and other Westerners the Himalayas have become a place to demonstrate prowess in exploration or mountain climbing. For the peoples who lived in the shadow of the Himalayas the mountains were never a barrier closing off communication. Humans have often migrated across the mountain passes between Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Ladakh, a well-known example being the Sherpa people who made their way from Tibet to the Solo Khumbu region of Nepal south of Chomolungma (Mother Goddess of the World) in the 1500s. The British later named this mountain Everest and employed Sherpas like Tenzing Norgay to help them make the first ascent in 1953. This “conquest of Everest” allowed many British newspapers at the time to claim a grand late-imperial triumph at the dawn of a new Elizabethan age.

In spite of its inaccessibility, the region has also often been fought over, most recently in 1962 as China and India clashed over disputed sections of their Himalayan boundary. During the British era, the Indian border with Tibet was pushed to the outer limits of Kashmir, Garwhal, Sikkim, and Assam. The Himalayas were never a barrier to trade as commercial routes snaked their way up high valleys and passes into Tibet from towns in north India and Nepal. The Bogle and Younghusband missions were (among other things) attempts by the British to insert themselves into these ancient trans-Himalayan trade routes connecting India with Central Asia and China.

In a lifetime of meticulous scholarship devoted to these northern borderlands of India, Alastair Lamb has made himself a respected authority. I have made use of all his writings including his two great framing narratives, *Britain and Chinese Central Asia. The Road to Lhasa 1767 to 1905* and *British India and Tibet 1766–1910*. More recently Lamb has edited a volume of primary-source material on Bogle himself – *Bhutan and Tibet. The Travels of George Bogle and Alexander Hamilton 1774–1777*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Alastair Lamb, *Britain and Chinese Central Asia. The Road to Lhasa 1767 to 1905* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960); Lamb, *British India and Tibet 1766–1910* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); Lamb, ed., *Bhutan and Tibet*, vol. I *Bogle and Hamilton Letters, Journals and Memoranda*.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73568-1 - Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904

Gordon T. Stewart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 10 Journeys to Empire

I have also learned a great deal from Alex McKay's three-volume *History of Tibet*, which brings together most of the significant modern writings on the history of that country, its cultures, and its regions.<sup>22</sup> McKay's comprehensive introduction to the history of Tibet, and his informative commentaries in each volume, have been extremely useful. As we shall see, what McKay has to say about the current state of history writing about Tibet, particularly the vexed topic of Tibet's relationship to China, can be surprisingly helpful in achieving a clearer perspective on Eurocentric discourses about the motivating ideologies behind empires.

Shortly after I began following the trail of George Bogle, I discovered that Kate Teltscher was already well ahead of me. All of her insights have been brought together in her book *The High Road to China. George Bogle, the Panchen Lama, and the First British Expedition to Tibet*.<sup>23</sup> After she had spoken to a mutual friend, Professor Jyotsna Singh (who writes on Renaissance travel writing and empire), I shared with her one of my then unpublished papers on Younghusband's theatrical invocation of Bogle which she made use of in her own book. I am greatly indebted to Kate Teltscher for her informative commentary on Bogle. The Younghusband Expedition of 1903–1904, which turned into the British invasion of Tibet, is a much better-known episode in British imperial history than Bogle's mission. There are two highly readable books which provide vivid descriptions – Peter Fleming's swashbuckling account *Bayonets to Lhasa*, and Patrick French's compelling biography *Younghusband. The Last Great Imperial Adventurer*.<sup>24</sup> First-rate books by Indian, British, and Tibetan scholars (all taking a less ethnocentric approach than Fleming) have explained the broader imperial and Asian contexts for understanding the British march to Lhasa in 1904.<sup>25</sup>

The Bogle and Younghusband missions to Tibet were widely separated episodes in imperial history, but they were brought into the same frame of reference at Khamba Dzong in July 1903 when Younghusband chose to make use of Bogle in his meeting with the Tibetan delegates sent by the

<sup>22</sup> Alex McKay, ed., *The History of Tibet*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Kate Teltscher, *The High Road to China. George Bogle, the Panchen Lama, and the First British Expedition to Tibet* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Peter Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa. The First Full Account of the British Invasion of Tibet in 1904* (New York: Harper, 1961); Patrick French, *Younghusband. The Last Great Imperial Adventurer* (London: HarperCollins, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Parshotam Mehra, *The Younghusband Expedition. An Interpretation* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1968); Premen Addy, *Tibet on the Imperial Chessboard. The Making of British Policy towards Lhasa 1899–1925* (London: Sangam Books, 1985); Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj. The Frontier Cadre 1904–1947* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997). Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet. A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 154–155, 204–223, briefly situates both missions in a general account of Tibetan political history.