
Reviews

Worms and swastikas: Hollywood loves Tibet

by Mary Burdman

Seven Years in Tibet

Motion picture by Mandalay Entertainment,
directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud

Hollywood has adopted various causes in its time: One of the earliest was the trials and tribulations of the Ku Klux Klan, in "The Birth of a Nation." The current craze is Tinseltown's version of Tibet. "Seven Years in Tibet" is only one of a series of Hollywood fantasies attempting to enlist the American population in a campaign to hate the nation of China, and to support a fantasy version of Tibet, depicted in movies starring filthy-rich Hollywood actors and actresses, whose only knowledge of Tibet is the Rolex-sporting, world-travelling Dalai Lama.

Since the makers and stars of "Seven Years in Tibet" have never been there (the film was shot in Argentina), they feel free to eulogize what was a primitive, filth- and devil-ridden culture, ruled by a death cult. Tibetan lamaism, a degenerate form of Buddhism with undertones of shamanism, is dominated by practitioners of Tantric occultism. The "higher" varieties of lamas engaged in various practices all aimed at mental masturbation as a path to "enlightenment" — which is nothing more than a preparation for death. Lamas regularly used bowls made of human skulls and "musical instruments" made of human thigh bones in religious rituals; Tibetan art is full of "fierce deities" in the throes of death-dances, wearing necklaces and belts of human skulls, or in orgiastic embraces with their hideous female counterparts, similarly adorned.

No wonder Hollywood is fascinated. The question is, whether more sensible members of the American public will follow along.

The Nazis and Tibet

Then, there is the Nazi problem. This movie stars blonde bombshell Brad Pitt, Hollywood's current "hottest property," as Heinrich Harrer, an Austrian mountaineer who escaped a British POW camp in eastern India in 1944, fled over the Himalayas into Tibet with a single companion, and made his

way to Lhasa. There, Harrer eventually met the young Dalai Lama and taught him about the outside world, before fleeing Tibet in 1951, as the People's Liberation Army entered Lhasa. Harrer had been captured as part of a German-Austrian expedition to climb the mountain Nanga Parbat in Kashmir in 1939.

Early parts of the movie had to be re-written, when it emerged, earlier this year, who Harrer really was. Austrian journalist Gerald Lehner, who has written on conditions in his country in the 1920s and 1930s, revealed all. Knowing that Harrer became a Nazi hero after he and three others climbed the Eiger Mountain, Lehner dug deeper. Besides the picture of Harrer and others flanking Adolf Hitler in July 1938, the Nazi propaganda ministry published a book on the climb, quoting Harrer: "It is an inestimable reward for us to see the Führer and be able to speak to him." Hitler began life, after all, as an Austrian degenerate.

Lehner travelled to the U.S. National Archive to discover Harrer's marriage application, on which Harrer wrote that he had been a member of the SA—the Nazi Stormtroopers, which were active, though banned, in Austria—since 1933, long before the *Anschluss* in 1938, when he joined the SS. Harrer barely admits that he was a member of the SS, but did acknowledge his own handwriting on the marriage document.

Director Jean-Jacques Annaud was recently interviewed on television asking why Harrer should be condemned for doing "what everyone in Europe was doing at the time." It was hardly the case that "everyone" in Germany or Austria, or anywhere else in Europe, joined fascist movements in 1933. Annaud would do better to speak for himself.

But the real issue here is not the details of Harrer's own life. It was no accident that a Nazi would end up in Tibet: Since the last century, Tibet has been an obsession of Western occultism, from its British imperial form to its Nazi manifestation.

Halford Mackinder of the London School of Economics, who founded British imperial "geopolitics" at the turn of this century, and his German follower Prof. Karl Haushofer, were fixated on the geopolitical "importance" of Tibet. Haushofer visited the Himalayas in the company of Lord Kitchener, a Viceroy of the British Raj in India, and Tibet. He was also profoundly influenced by the Russian geopolitical mystic Gurdjieff. Haushofer was a mystic of the Thule Society, the cult of the "Aryan" myth and breeding ground of the Nazi Party, which adopted myths of a super race hidden in Tibet, from Madame Blavatsky's Theosophists.

The great worm rescue

So, how does Hollywood deal with all this? Brad Pitt, sporting a lisp as an attempt at a German accent (which he, fortunately, forgets as the movie progresses), portrays Harrer as a troubled young man with a serious attitude problem—with the only advantage that he, supposedly, has as much of a negative attitude to Nazi authority as to any other.



The use of torture under the feudal system in Tibet, was routine. Clockwise from upper left: A serf who lost his arm through torture; a serf who had his eyes gouged out; a serf child left alone to die; ritual instruments made of hands and arms chopped off from serfs.

This “attitude” enables him, with one other companion, to escape the British and make his way into Tibet. After a few brushes with the nastier realities of Tibetan life, Harrer and friend enter the city of Lhasa, and leave all their troubles behind. Here, he is befriended by the local nobility, and eventually is introduced to the young Dalai Lama, whom he fills in on the great world (Dialogue: “I want you to build me a movie theater”; and, “Tell me, what is an elevator?”).

The first request leads to the highlight of the movie: the great worm rescue. On complying with his youthful holiness’s request to be able to see movies, Harrer/Pitt began construction on a small theater. Digging the foundation led to a problem, apparently not encountered before: the worms in the dirt. Perhaps had Harrer not had such an attitude, the worms would all have courteously vacated the area. As it is, the Tibetan workers would not continue to dig for him, because, as one official explains, “These worms could all be your mother, and we cannot kill them.” Fathers, one must presume, manage to find themselves other futures. Lamas come to the rescue, and each worm is lovingly taken away, to be re-buried where they are safe from the Dalai’s building plans.

Meanwhile, Harrer’s attitude is also undergoing changes, as he encounters Tibetan life. He loses the girl, despite displaying his scrapbook of his mountaineering achievements, which somehow survived two years in the Himalayan wilderness, and finally walks off into the sunset, to recover his son, born in Austria after Harrer was already incarcerated in the Indian POW camp.

The message: He stepped into “paradise,” only to lose it again. Pitt and friend repeatedly compare China to the Nazis; all Chinese in the movie, representing either the earlier Republic of China or the succeeding People’s Republic, are nasty, underhanded, and slitty-eyed. The first set bribe and spy; the second set stomp and shoot. In one scene, where representatives of the PLA fly into Lhasa to attempt to negotiate with the Tibetans, they are greeted by Tibetan defenses: melting yak-butter models of Tibetan gods, twirling lamas, bleating horns, and droning monks. Any person from a civilized nation, would have thought he had walked into a madhouse.

Hollywood might find this heaven on earth, but one hopes the rest of the United States can rise above the appeal of worms and yak-butter.