

On the Images of Tibetan Areas in the Eyes of David-Neel

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Abstract: Alexandra David-Neel was “the first European to break into the Roof of the world”. She has written a lot about Tibet in all her life, among which My journey to Lhasa was the greatest one. The author's personal experience intuitively reflects the real world in Tibetan areas. In the eyes of David-Neel, Tibetan areas are naturally beautiful and dangerous. Generally speaking, Tibetans are simple and lovely. They generally have religious beliefs and strong national identity.

1. Introduction

It has never been easy to reach Tibet. The encircling high mountains, the sparsely populated spaces, and the climatic extremes at such an altitude made it all but inaccessible. So, Tibet is mysterious to the western world. The “Roof of the World” and “Shangri-La” is full of magical temptations for Western explorers, travelers and cultural researchers. But due to its vast realm and other reasons, before the 19th century, Tibet came into being out of imagination for westerners. They got to know Tibetan areas through documentary records and hearsay, and thus formed the original images of Tibet. According to relevant data, the exploring of Tibet by westerners could be traced back to 1253. The French Rubrout was sent to Mongolia on the order of the Pope. He observed Tibetan culture and traditions, including its languages, funeral rituals, dresses and Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia. These fabrics of life were mentioned in Rubrout's writings to the king. Since the nineteenth century, the western society had set off a research upsurge in Tibet, lasting for several centuries until today. The discovering of Tibet in the western world began with missionaries, adventurers, travelers, diplomats and other professionals, and was gradually favored by literary writers and scholars. A large number of literary works and academic research achievements on Tibet were published, such as *Thibet* (Victor Segalen 1878-1919), *Addresse au Dalai Lama* (Antonin Artaud, 1896-1948, a poet and dramatist), *l'ombre des monastères tibétains* (Jean Marques Rivière), *Souvenirs d'un voyage dans la Tartarie et le Thibet pendant les années 1844, 1845 et 1846* (le Père Évariste Huc, 1813-1860, missionary), *Lost Horizon* (James Hilton, 1900-1954), *Discovery of Tibet*, from Marco Polo to David-Neel (Michael Taylor), and so on.

2. Tibetan Areas in the Eyes of Westerners Before David-Neel

As early as around the 5th century AD, the legend of gold everywhere in Tibet had spread to the western world. Around the 12th century, the legend that Tibetans were descendants of King John who had defeated pagans, Persians and Mitians was circulated in the western world. Obviously, for westerners, the Tibetan people were foreigners, and Tibet was a fancy world. Before David-Neel, there were some westerners who had arrived in Tibet. They wrote down what they saw in their travel logs or other materials to record the early images of Tibet by westerners. Friar named Odrick de Portenone arrived in Lhasa in 1325, but the authenticity of his logs were questionable. The first Europeans who went to Lhasa and left a true travel book were Father Grueber and Father d'Orville, who traveled from Han to Xining and lived in Lhasa for two months. In 1626, Antoniodo Andrade, a Portuguese missionary, entered the Ali region of Western Tibet to spread Christianity. German Jesuit John Gruber arrived in Lhasa in 1661. In 1715, Jesuits Desideri and Father Freyre arrived in Lhasa, where Desideri lived for 13 years. In 1719, Horace de La Penna arrived in Lhasa, where the Gabb Missionary Church established a chapel and an orphanage, converting some people. In 1720, Van der Putte, the Dutch, was the first secular person to enter the Tibetan capital and remained in

Lhasa for several years. In 1811, Thomas Manning, an Englishman, arrived in Lhasa with the attendant of a general from Qing dynasty and stayed there for a month. In 1846, Régis-Evariste Huc (1813-1860), a French envoy to Gabb, arrived in Lhasa as a pious and benevolent clergyman after an 18-month long journey, and wrote the journey into the Travel Note of Tatar Tibet, which recorded in detail the customs, religious beliefs, lifestyles, mountain and river features, social economy, and posts of all ethnic groups along the way and personal experiences. In 1893, Bonvalot, Prince Henrid'Orleans ,Mr. Dutreuilde Rhins and Grenard arrived at Lake Namu. Edmond Candlerl, a member of the British Expeditionary Force, entered Lhasa in 1904 and recorded his experiences along the way. Jacques Bacot (1877-1967), an academician of the French Academy of Epigraphy and American Literature, made two trips to southeastern Tibet around 1906-1910, crossing the upper reaches of the Lancang River and reaching the Yabi area in the northwest of the Arrow Firing Furnace (now Kang ding). British Major F. Kingdon Ward traveled in the Tsa rong areas in 1911 and 1914. Major Baily, an Englishman, made maps of some of Tsa rong areas in 1911.

In these western accounts, first of all, the Tibetan area was not in the fairytale, changing from a simple imagination to the stage of discovery and cognition. Secondly, Tibetans were considered to be foreign nationalities. In addition to the legend that Tibetans were descendants of King John, there was also a view that Tibetans were descendants of Aryans living in Shambara. To this end, Hitler sent an expedition to Tibet to collect anthropological and archaeological evidence to determine the origin of the Aryan race. Thirdly, Tibetan Buddhism was considered to be a religion similar to Christianity and Catholicism, or a variant of Christianity; Tibetan Buddhism was under criticism. For example, "Father Antoniode Andrade believed that Tibetan Buddhism had similarities with Christianity in sacrifice and other aspects. He also made many subjective assumptions and even distorted the concepts and forms of Tibetan Buddhism. He considered the Buddhist gods attaching to Tibetan Buddhism as angels, the Tibetan Buddhist vajry pestle as a cross, and blamed Tibetan Buddhist monks for their misconceptions of Buddhist Three Treasures with the belief of Christianity's Trinity". Gubocha pointed out that there were close relations and similarities between Lamaism worship and Catholicism, and believed that Master Zongkaba lived in the era when Christianity was introduced into the Western Regions, so there was a very obvious similarity with Christianity in Buddhist reform. For Kant, the Tibetan Buddhist Dhyana and meditation criticism of Tibetan Buddhism were confined to the perceptual realm, not rise to the rational level, and thus easily fell into mysticism. German scholar Held holds that "if there is a religion on earth which is absurd and disharmonious in nature, this is Tibetan religion". Fourthly, the Tibetans were regarded as a people outside the world and trapped in ignorance. They were superstitious and ignorant. Gubocha claimed that "Tibetans are far from being a model in terms of good customs and habits". As a religious figure, he showed more blank, biased and condescending pity for this nation.

3. Tibetan Areas in the Eyes of David-Neel

Alexandra David-Neel was a famous French Tibetologist, explorer and Buddhist. Many people in Europe call her the first European to break into the Roof of the World, "with white skin and yellow soul". In her youth, she learned Sanskrit from the famous French Indian and Chinese scholar, Silvan Levy and Edward Foucaux. In the Supreme Theological Society of Paris, she had read a large number of Tibetan sacred texts in translation, and made great achievements in Sanskrit, theology, and mysticism. She believed that Buddhism was not only a religion, but also a philosophy. She produced many works on Tibet, such as *My journey to Lhasa*, *Tibet's Austria* and *Witchcraft*, *In the Areas of Aristocracy and Banditry*, *Widows in the West of Wide China*, *Lifetime of Superman Gesar in Lingdi*, *Buddhist Philosophy and Austria*, *Supreme Wisdom*, *Buddhism and Its Doctrine and Practice*, *Immortality and Rebirth*, and *Tibetan Novels*. *Magic and Magic of Love* (later renamed *Passion and Magic*). Among these works, the most vivid depiction of Tibet was *My Journey to Lhasa* .

My Journey to Lhasa was the fourth trip to Tibet by Mrs. Alexandra David-Neel from 1923 to 1924. The book was first published in 1927, and immediately caused a wide concern in the world. It was reprinted many times and was translated into many languages of the East and the West. In the

1980s and 1990s alone, six editions were published in France. Many of Mrs. David-Neel's works were fiction, political theory, diaries, letters and treatises. Only this book was a documentary travel book. Mrs. David-Neel, disguised as an old Lama mother, traveled with Yongden, the righteous son. They crossed the frozen desert, the mysterious Panba region, the Yarlung Zangbo River, exorcising, begging and sneaking all the way. During the journey, they kept repelling the interdiction and invasion of bandits, and passed through the most dangerous passage that Westerners had not yet traveled, and withstood the most severe test. In this way, after more than four months of adventure and hard journey, in 1924, Tibet New Year's Eve, they quietly arrived in the mysterious "Forbidden City", Lhasa. As a western female explorer and believer, for the first time in world history, she crossed the two continents of Europe and Asia, and completed the long and magical Buddhist road of Paris-Lhasa. She recorded a large number of geographical features, local customs, houses and buildings in Tibetan areas, and people from various Tibetan regions. Unlike other novels and academic works, this book introduced the authentic Tibetan areas in the early 20th century to the Western world by her experience, paving the way for the understanding and communication between Chinese and Western cultures.

3.1 Majestic and Enchanting Tibetan Natural Scenery

There are many sacred lakes in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Snow mountains, glaciers, steppes, forests and rivers all show mystic looks. As early as 1912, when David-Neel lived in Himalaya, she had already felt the magical and beautiful natural scenery of Tibet and was full of infinite yearning. In the introduction to *My journey to Lhasa*, she wrote: "Suddenly, before me, there appeared a vast and magical Tibetan plateau, bounded by a hazy illusion in the distance, marked by the chaotic appearance of the pale purple and orange peaks with snow crowns. What an unforgettable sight it is! It makes me linger and forget to return, willing to stay in this charming scenery forever". At the beginning of this journey, David-Neel gave a general overview of the mysterious and infinite temptation of Tibetan natural scenery. "I took my small pack of livestock across the vast and desolate Tibetan region. Whether it is a dry desert or a desolate plain, all these areas are quiet and inaccessible. They are unpredictable and therefore attractive. This is the place of dreams and mysteries"^[6]. In fact, the natural landscape of Tibet embraces not only magical snow mountains, vast grasslands, quiet lakes, roaring rivers, but also beautiful scenery, blue sky, white clouds, lofty Tibetan Buddhist God Mountain, magnificent Gangdisê God Mountain, Pentium Yarlung Zangbo River, and even crows staying on high pillars. Tibetan areas are embroidered with beautiful scenes, like a fairyland. According to David-Neel, villages, mountains and rivers in Tibetan areas all reveal magical and beautiful colors. "This magical building complex is bathed in a light golden light. There was no noise, no animal hoarse. But there is a silver bell sound that can barely be heard, which comes to our ears from time to time. We're stuck in a wooden fowl. Is it in Tibet or has we arrived at a place where beautiful fairies live"^[7]? At night, steep cliffs, vast plains, huge glaciers and mountain streams also exude a unique charm. "The lifeless scenery of the day seemed to wake up in the moonlight. Meteors shine on the snow, reflecting the light from the top of the mountain; murmuring whispers seem to be blown by the wind, and they seem to exchange some incomprehensible information"^[8]. During the journey, David-Neel and his adopted son Yongden also encountered wild animals, experiencing heavy snow, getting lost and so on, but all the fatigue and pain in the journey were dispelled by the beautiful Tibetan scenery. At the end of his travels, David-Neel sighed, "The magical sun of Central Asia shines on its landscape, which strengthens its color and makes the pale white peaks on the horizon shine. Everything seems very exciting, full of light, as if it is ready to become a fire... This is a scene that will never be forgotten, and that alone fully repays the fatigue I endured to appreciate it"^[9].

3.2 The simple and lovely Tibetans

David-Neel spent some time in Tibetan seclusion and visited Pan Chen. Once, residents of a village about 19 kilometers from the hermitage where she lived were asked to pay a fine up to 200 rupees immediately for having failed to inform British consul the departure of David-Neel. Villagers robbed part of what she had left in the village in retaliation, ignored David-Neel's

complaints and refused to give it back. The unfair treatment compelled her to leave the area within fourteen days. At this time, David-Neel was angry and called the residents of the area a little wild and ignorant mountain people and said that such practices were against civilized behavior. But such behavior also showed the Tibetan people's straightforward feelings, focusing on the direct choice of interests. In most parts of *My Journey to Lhasa*, although David-Neel suffered a lot during her journey, Tibetans in general were simple and lovely in her works. At the side of the Salween River, David-Neel and his adopted son Yongden met an abandoned dying man, who was on his pilgrimage. He lost his strength because of a strange disease. His companion had slowed down his journey for several days, and then they had stopped for a whole day; when he did not get better, his companion abandoned him to the side of the road and resumed their journey. Faced with such situation, David-Neel specifically explained in her article. These unbelievable habits did not mean that Tibetans had a heart of stone. They tried their best to keep patients in a village or a pastoral area, but it didn't work sometimes. In some sparsely populated areas, food shortages were inevitably raised. Strong travelers couldn't risk running out of necessities of their own for too long; otherwise, they had no chance of getting supplies. "I am deeply aware of this situation through my own experience, and have been forced to starve with my followers and livestock in the snow in the extremely remote area of northern Tibet"^[10]. When Yongden accepted the patient's request, performing the usual rites for him to comfort him, David-Neel made a religious promise for the patient, telling him that he was lucky to be reborn in the kingdom of Chenrezigs, and that he was always free from the bondage of life and death reincarnation. Meanwhile, he hoped to help the patient in some way, but was refused. The patient said, "I have food and money in my bag. I'm well here, with the gods." On her subsequent journey, Yongden helped a sick girl by divination. Yongden, after holding religious rituals in an orthodox form of Buddhism, told the girl and other Pilgrims how to eradicate the devil that caused the girl's illness and imparted a magic spell to the girl's mother, helping the girl avoid being abandoned. When they met the previous group of pilgrims at a chÖrten, of whom Yongden had offered help to the sick girl, the pilgrims began to tell about strange miracles performed by Yongden. "Each told a more miraculous story than their friends. Their fantastic stories were more sensational and vivid than the former ones. Finally, one of them announced that he clearly saw the Lama not crossing the river from the bridge, but passing by the bridge, that is, walking in the air"^[11]. In this way, the parties were not shy of fabricating various exaggerated and false "miracles" to express their respect for the learned and helpful Lama in order to spread his deeds in the form of folklore. David-Neel commented with emotion that "this simple feeling and its expression have made Tibet's life particularly cordial and likable"^[12].

3.3 Devout Tibetan Religion Believers

When entering Tibet, the first humanistic landscape to be seen were the Tibetan prayer flags flying everywhere, and mountains were inscribed with true Buddhist doctrine. Dignified or gentle Buddha statues, and travelers who were on their pilgrimage were to be seen in Tibet. David-Neel was no stranger to Tibetan religious beliefs. She studied Tibetology and Orientalism when she was in France. She read through two collections of Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, *Ganjul* and *Danjul*. She also tried her best to find every opportunity to talk to the humanistic lamas, the Orthodox Masters, believers and monks about the contents of secret missionary doctrine and lived with them. As early as 1904, the article "Tibetan Monks and their Doctrines" was published. In 1912, the 13th Dalai Lama met her in Sikkim, and she became the first European folk woman to be welcomed by the lama. Since then, a large number of books on Tibetan religion, such as *Tibet's Oyi and Witchcraft*, *Buddhist Philosophy and Oyi*, *Supreme Wisdom*, *Buddhism and Its Doctrine and Practice Method*, *Immortality and Reincarnation*, had been created, and even a "wisdom lamp" was taken as her Buddhist name. In the introduction to *My Journey to Lhasa*, David-Neel confessed, "These charming discussions led me to enter a more magical world than the remote areas of high altitude in Tibet, which is the world of monks and wizards who spent their lives secretly between snow peaks"^[13]. Thus, exploring the true meaning of Tibetan national beliefs and religious consciousness was the main reason for attracting David-Neel to this trip. When passing through a mountain pass,

even though the altitude was higher and the natural environment was worse, religious traces could be seen, such as Manichea in the mountain pass, the ground around the mountain pass used for God worship, and there were many mystic flags flying over the mountain pass and the nearby ridge. During the journey, the majority of the Pilgrims were those who had great faith in religion. David-Neel and Yongden, the righteous son, made their pilgrimage to Lhasa as pilgrims. "I decided to adopt the costume of a pilgrim because it would provide me with the best means of action without attracting attention. Yongden is a true Lama and a learned man, and he should be able to play his part very well. His mother is engaged in long-distance pilgrimage out of devotion, and will inevitably behave like a compassionate person who will arouse the favor of others"^[14]. Religious people had certain privileges in Tibet and commanded a certain respect. When Yongden once told his colleagues that his father was a nagspa who could command the devil and kill any being from afar, and that his mother was a secret mother taught by his father, everyone looked up to David-Neel with respect, and the leader of the team gave them a piece of dried meat. At the same time, the mood has also become serious since then. They also provided Lama Yongden and his secret mother with a little present of butter and tsampa as necessities of life on the journey. The reason for pretending to be a pilgrim was that pilgrims came from distant regions belonging to different tribes, and some of them were quite different. Their appearance, accent, pronunciation, clothing and their intricacies were very complicated. Only when they were hidden in the ranks of devoted believers could they avoid being recognized as foreign woman, thus making their dress "reasonable". Since pilgrims were firm religion believers, they were not easy to be questioned by those in power, and could win the sympathy of Tibetans.

In the book, David-Neel recorded many stories related to religious beliefs. For example, almost all people wanted to divine and bless Lamas when they met them, giving them special care when they ate and lived, inviting Lamas to hold special religious ceremonies when they faced death; all people were afraid of Lamas who held secret spiritual spells, especially when they did things against religious rituals. As David-Neel passed through the bandit-infested area, she said, "In Tibet, unless it is firmly believed that no one has discovered it, the most prudent way is to spend the night with the local people, even if people are sure they are real bandits." The reason is that most Tibetans (unless they are drunk) will protect their lives and abide by some peculiar idea, hesitating to kill. This feeling stems from the Buddhist doctrine of respecting life that fills Tibetans' hearts"^[15]. When a peasant woman refused to provide accommodation for pilgrims by lying, David-Neel exposed her lies in a deified manner, and then declared in a serious tone that the illness would enter her home due to the fact that she lied to the holy pilgrim about a family member's illness. This religious divine prophecy frightened the farmer and immediately knelt down to confess her mistake and burst into tears.

3.4 Strong sense of national identity

Freud believes that "identity" is a process of emotional and psychological convergence between individuals and others, groups or imitative characters. This concept includes individual identity and group identity. Carla believes that national identity refers to the individual's beliefs, attitudes and recognition of their national identity, which includes four elements: group awareness, group attitude, group behavior and group belonging, among which attitude is the most critical one. In the collision and exchange of different civilizations and cultural environments, there inevitably exists impact and friction. From the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, Tibetan areas were basically "forbidden zones" for the western world. After the 1911 Revolution, the forbidden regions became more extensive. Long-term closure made Tibetan areas little known to the outside world. Due to British aggression in Tibet, Tibetan people had an increasing hostility to westerners. In the introduction, David-Neel wrote, "The roads in the Himalayas, which were easy to reach 15 years ago, are now blocked by a multitude of sentinel posts. They not only blocked the border of Tibet, but also the vicinity where they met for more than 50 kilometers. Travelers wishing to travel to Sikkim must obtain a travel permit before they can travel. It specifically stated that the holder "does not need to enter Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet, and cannot visit any place by any road other than the one

indicated in his permit”. In this case, previous attempts by David-Neel to travel had failed. She disguised herself for this successful trip to Lhasa. As a “pilgrim”, she had to make her clothes look sour, wearing a worn Tibetan hat which played a huge role in her adventure, together with slightly curved pointed boots and skirts purchased in Kangdi, growing hair and combing yak tails into her hair, wearing large earrings, and using a ground charcoal and cocoa mixture to cover up the original white skin and brown hair, so that they had a national certificate. Throughout the trip, David-Neel's greatest concern was to avoid being recognized by others; otherwise, the trip would fail. Every time someone suspected her unusual appearance or she imprudently exposed herself, she would be terrified. Thus, before the middle of the 20th century, the Tibetan people had a strong sense of identity, and had a strong sense of identity for their religious beliefs, hair ornaments, clothing and so on.

4. Conclusion

In May 1924, when David-Neel returned to France, she was warmly welcomed as a hero and won the Medal of Honor of France, stimulating the “David-Neel craze” and being invited to give reports, speeches, publish books and articles. In June 1926, *My Journey to Lhasa* was published and soon translated into German, Dutch, Spanish and Czech. The book's popularity and great success stemmed from the fact that it not only reflected the authentic Tibetan areas, changed the traditional understanding of Tibet in the western world, but also further enriched and consolidated their yearning and admiration for Shangri-La, which was called “a worldwide work”. This change was prompted by David-Neel, which also reflected that the recognition and understanding of Tibet in the Western world would enter a new stage.

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