

Hegemonic Politics and Power Logic: British Writing in Xizang in the Early 20th Century

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Abstract: In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the British Empire was at its zenith, with colonies spread across the world. After the Opium Wars, Xizang, situated on the western frontier of China, found itself coveted by two major powers, Britain and Russia which were seeking to expand their influence in China. This led to the famous "Great Game" between the two nations. Subsequently, Britain invaded Xizang twice and left numerous records about Xizang in the early 20th century. Under the logic of colonialist power, British descriptions of Xizang and the Xizang people were fraught with bias and criticism. Their writings on Xizang did not transcend the imperial discourse logic, becoming an integral part of the discourse of the British Empire.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, due to the colonial expansion of western capitalist countries, Xizang, which adhered to the closed policy under the rule of the Qing government, became the object of criticism. The image of Xizang in British works fell to the bottom in the narration of British invaders, and "Ignorance" became one of the most characteristic formulations in British Xizang writing in the 20th century. Xizang under the British invaders became a symbol of ignorance, barbarism, squalor and backwardness. At the same time, it also became the object of disdain and criticism by the colonists. This narrative found a suitable excuse for the British colonial aggression.

1. History of Invasion

The British Empire was at its height in the 19th century, and its colonies were spread all over the world. India, at the southern foot of the Himalayas, played an important role in these colonies. In order to ensure the vested interests of the British Empire in the South Asian subcontinent, according to the geographical characteristics and surrounding environment of India, the British colonists put forward the so-called strategic concept of "safeguarding the security of India", the core contents of which included: three buffer zones, two concentric circles and an inner lake. They envisioned "British-administered Xizang" as one of the three buffer zones. Nepal became a British protectorate in 1816, Darjeeling was annexed in 1835, Kashmir and Ladakh were swallowed up in 1856, Soon Sikkim and Bhutan also fell under British protection, Assam was annexed to British India in 1886. The ambitious British military was at a stone's throw from Xizang.

After the Opium War, in order to expand the invasion of China, Xizang, as the western border, was actually under the covetousness of two great powers, Britain and Russia. The both empires attempted

to bring Xizang under their "spheres of influence". Tsarist Russia made intensive preparations for the southbound Indian Ocean strategy, targeting the northwest and southwest regions of China. The actions of Tsarist Russia posed a certain threat to Britain's ambition to invade Xizang. Thus, the famous "Great Game" between these two nations unfolded, with England seeking to control Xizang as a buffer to counteract Russia's advances. Consequently, they anxiously sought an opportunity to enter Xizang, leading to a discreet or overt struggle between the two nations regarding Xizang.

There were two armed British invasions of Xizang. The first time was in 1888, when the British invaded Sikkim under the pretext of Xizang troops and put pressure on the Qing government, demanding that the Xizang forces withdraw from Lontse in Sikkim within a time limit, or the British troops would also be stationed there. The Qing government, fearing war on the Xizang side, repeatedly made concessions and demanded that the Xizang army withdraw its troops from Lontse. After the war, the Qing government and British government signed "Anglo-Chinese Convention Relating to Sikkim and Xizang" and "Regulations Regarding Trade, Communication and Pasturage to Be Appended to the Sikkim-Xizang Convention of 1890," successively, which recognized Sikkim under the protection of Britain and opened Yatung as a commercial port, where Britain enjoyed extraterritorial laws and the privilege of not paying taxes on imported goods for five years. From then on, the British Empire extended its reach into Xizang.

In 1903, the British Indian government sent an invading army led by Colonel Francis Younghusband to cross the border into Xizang in the name of negotiations. On 31 March 1904, the British invaders met the Xizang army in the Tremisen Valley, north of Phari. In this battle, most of the more than 1,000 Xizang troops were killed and wounded. This is a barbaric massacre by the British imperialists against the soldiers and civilians of Xizang.

On 31 March 1904, British forces engaged Xizang forces in a battle north of Gyantse, where the majority of Xizang forces were killed or wounded. This battle marked a brutal massacre of Xizang soldiers and civilians by British imperialism. On 11 April and 6 July 1904, the British invaded Gyantse twice. On 3 August, British forces entered Lhasa, trampling upon the sacred city of Xizang Buddhism. Under various pressures, the British invaders withdrew from Lhasa in late September 1904. Before departing, the British forced the local Xizang government to sign the "Treaty of Lhasa." In April 1906 in Beijing, they signed the "Convention Between Great Britain and China Respecting Xizang Convention Between Great Britain and China Respecting Xizang", known as "Convention of Peking".

Through these two invasions, the British Empire gained various privileges in Xizang, while also creating serious border crises for China. It sowed the seeds of future Sino-Indian border disputes. On 18 August 1907 the United Kingdom and Russia concluded the "Triple Entente" in St. Petersburg, resolving their disputes in Persia, Afghanistan, and Xizang. Regarding Xizang, both nations acknowledged China's "sovereignty" over Xizang and committed not to interfere in Xizang's internal affairs. Both countries also agreed not to station any representatives in Lhasa. However, the special interests that Britain had already gained in Xizang were recognized.

This is a microcosm of imperialist powers invading and dividing China. At a time when the once-mighty Chinese Empire was in decline and struggling to fend off the encirclement of hostile nations, its southwestern frontier, Xizang, was naturally unable to stand alone and had to endure the suffering and misfortune brought about by colonial invasions.

2. The Colonialists' Logic of Might

The second British invasion of Xizang held special significance. "On the West, however, its mysteries exerted a fascination which endures today. By the end of the nineteenth century there were few major enigmas left on the African continent. Save for Antarctica, whose austere secrets were already arousing the competitive instincts of explorers, Xizang was the only region of the world to

which access was all but impossible for white men and concerning which the small sum of existing knowledge served rather to tantalise than to instruct." [1]

The British military invasion of Xizang exposed Lhasa, the holy city of Xizang Buddhism, to a large number of Westerners for the first time. In the past, only a lucky few were able to see the holy City, and their stories were often filled with mystery. This time, the veil of secrecy around the holy City has been rudely lifted, and what the colonists left behind is more of a naked and biased depiction of reality.

As for the cause of this invasion, the reasons given by the British, which considers itself a "civilized people", are very "rational". British military correspondent Edmund Candler said: "We were drawn into the vortex of war against our will by the folly and obstinacy of the Xizangs" [2]

In ancient times, the conquest of the so-called "civilized man" by the nomads was naked, without any slogans or ideas. The land, population, and wealth were the only reasons. However, when "civilized" people sought to conquer so-called "barbarians," there were always some convenient excuses, wrapped in noble intentions. Excuses included "obstruction by savages" to their demands for free trade, mistreatment by barbarians or perceived humiliation, and other such justifications. Edmund Candler listed the "foolishness and stubbornness" for the invasion: first, the Chinese imperial government sent troops to expel Nepalese invaders from Xizang, leading Xizang to adopt a closed-door and exclusionary policy. Second, Xizang did not adhere to "Regulations Regarding Trade, Communication and Pasturage to Be Appended to the Sikkim-Xizang Convention of 1890" and failed to establish a trade mart in Yatung, as stipulated by the treaty. In reality, these two incidents concealed British ambitions for Xizang. Edmund Candler particularly mentioned the motives for invading Xizang in his book, highlighting considerations regarding the competition with Russia over Xizang: "Needless to say, the discovery of Russian designs was the real and prime cause of the despatch of the mission, while Xizang's violation of treaty rights and refusal to enter into any relations with us were convenient as ostensible motives. It cannot be denied that these grievances were valid enough to justify the strongest measures." Power-holders always seek convenient excuses to lend their conquest actions the semblance of logic and righteousness.

As Edward W. Said notes in the preface to "Orientalism": "Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn't trust the evidence of one's eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest mission civilizatrice." [3]

Thousands of Xizangs fell in pools of blood as the British invaders fought their way to Lhasa under the banner of "civilization." The Xizangs used the outdated weapons of the Middle Ages to resist the colonial guns and cannons, and paid an extremely heavy price. Even the invaders who took part in the invasion admitted that it was not a battle, but a massacre, "Then there entered the peaceful valley all the horrors of war--dead and maimed men in the streets and houses, burning villages, death and destruction of all kinds. Gyantse Plain and the town became scenes of desolation." "In this affair our casualties only amounted to five wounded and two killed. One hundred and forty dead of the enemy were counted outside the camp." "The unfortunate Xizangs were now hemmed in between to fires, and hardly a man of them escaped it was estimated that their losses were 300." When the Xizangs fell in batches under the guns of the invaders, the British army kept emphasizing "the sanctity of the British subject". They considered the massacres a warning and punishment, "But if they (Xizang) have learnt that our displeasure is dangerous they will take care not to provoke it again."

As the "other", the weakness of the East became a validation of the myth of the strength of the West, and the British and Xizangs were assigned two distinct colors of value: Britain were civilized, humane, and rational even when they committed mass murder; As for the Xizangs, they are dirty, barbaric and ignorant, and the slaughter is of little consequence.

This narrative clearly illustrates the colonialists' logic of might. In the binary opposition-based ideology of colonialism and colonial discourse, the boundaries of identity are well-defined. Self and

other, Westerners and Easterners, carry entirely opposing cultural attributes. It is the existence of these boundaries that upholds the colonial order. In the process of distinguishing "us" from "them," these "scientific" methods placed the two on different starting lines in competition. In the evolutionary sequence, the East is forever lagging behind the West, and only the highly evolved West can bring civilization and hope to this barbaric land[4].

3. Xizang: The Wild and Remote Land in the Eyes of Colonizers

Xizang is a unique and relatively isolated region. Its landscape, climate, religion, mode of production and way of life are all unique. Before the invasion of the colonists, Westerners had very different narratives about Xizang, which first came from the closed nature of Xizang. When the closed door was broken and the veil of mystery was lifted, Xizang in the eyes of the colonialists was first a lifeless "wilderness." The reasons lie in the following three aspects:

Firstly, the geographical features of Xizang were exceptional. The Qinghai-Xizang Plateau, known as the "Roof of the World," is the world's latest and largest uplifted plateau, with the highest elevation. It is often referred to as the "Third Pole of the Earth," after the North and South Poles. To the north, the Kunlun Mountains, Karakoram Mountains, and the Tanggula Mountains, as well as the Himalayas to the south, form formidable natural barriers, cutting off Xizang from the surrounding regions. The limited transport passes are often blocked by snow and ice, effectively guarding against unexpected visitors from outside.

In the extremely challenging transportation conditions of the time, only a very few foreigners could reach Lhasa. "The difficulty of the passes, the severity of the climate, the sterility of the mountains and tablelands, make the interior of the country almost inaccessible to an invading army." This land was seen as "the most desolate":

I thought it was one of the most desolate spots I had seen. My first impression were a wilderness of gray stones and gray, uninhabited houses, felled tree-trunks denuded of bark, white and spectral on the hillside. There was no life, no children's voices or chattering women, no bazaar apparently, no dogs barking, not even a pariah to greet you. If there was a sound of life it was the bray of some discontented mule searching for stray blades of grass among the stone.

The path of the invading army was also rough and extremely difficult. "After that the path is a 6-foot mule-track, at its best a rough, dusty incline, at its worst a succession of broken rocks and frozen puddles, which give no foothold to transport animals." The best parts of the route were often dusty, uneven slopes, and the worst were sections of broken stones and frozen mud puddles where pack animals could barely find footing. The roads here were a Gog-forsaken hole where wasn't going to be the ghost of a show"

Secondly, climate played a significant role. Due to the influence of topography, landforms, and atmospheric circulation, Xizang's climate is unique and complex, characterized by cold, arid conditions in the northwest and warm, humid conditions in the southeast. The average elevation of the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau is over 4,000 meters, and its high-altitude climate is marked by low oxygen pressure, cold and dry air, long hours of sunshine, strong solar radiation, and significant diurnal temperature variations. The unique climate features, just like the distinctive geographical characteristics, acted as a barrier against external intrusion:

For ten years the village (Yatung) has enjoyed the distinction of being the only place in Southern Xizang accessible to Europeans.....it is a dreary enough place to live in, shrouded as it is in cloud more than half the year round, and embedded in a valley so deep and narrow that in winter-time the sun has hardly risen above one cliff when it sinks behind another.

Even if the emperor entered Xizang, they needed to endure the test of cold, "Tuna, a desolate hamlet on the Xizang plateau, exposed to the coldest winds of Asia, where the thermometer falls to 25° below zero. Detachments of the escort are scattered along the line of communications in places of varying cold and discomfort.....to cold to wash or shave, shivering in a dirty Xizang fort, half suffocated with smoke from a yak-dung fire." "Despite the protection of almost Arctic clothing, one

shivers until the sun rises over the eastern hill at ten o'clock, and shivers again when it sinks behind the opposite one at three. Icy winds sweep the valley, and hurricanes of dust invade one's tent." The local castle made them uncomfortable as the local climate, "The fort (Phari Jong) is most insanitary, but a military occupation is necessary. The hacking coughs which are prevalent among officers and men are due to impurities of the air which affect the lung. Cartloads of dirt are being scraped away every day, but gusts of wind from the lower stories blow up more dust, which penetrates every nook and cranny of the draughty rooms, so that there is a fresh layer by nightfall. To clear the lower stories and cellars would be a hopeless task."

In fact, the backward production and living conditions in Xizang at that time give us reason to believe that the description of the British does reflect the normal life at that time to a certain extent, and provides a reference basis for us to understand the social conditions in Xizang a hundred years ago. Xizang's harsh climate, difficult roads, harsh living environment, and closed society must also be true. However, it cannot be denied that the British narrative perspective of Xizang is highly selective[5]. Their records mainly focus on the "barbaric", "backward" and "ignorant" aspects of constructing the image of Xizang, and exaggerate the "bravery" and "perseverance" of the aggressors. In their eyes, the natural scenery, cultural landscape, religion and culture of Xizang are not worth noting. In their texts, the unique natural or cultural aspects of Xizang are either ignored or mercilessly mocked and criticized[6].

4. Xizang: The Backward Ethnic Group in the Eyes of Colonizers

In the gallery of images shaped by Western literature, one of the most intriguing portrayals is that of the Eastern image. In the vast majority of texts, particularly when compared to Western self-images, the Eastern image is often denigrated and rejected. In various literary works, Westerners generally regarded themselves as rational, peace-loving, civilized, broad-minded, logical, courageous like men, capable of upholding genuine values, superiority, and progress.[7] In contrast, Easterners were commonly seen as authoritarian, greedy, licentious, primitive, living without order, dirty, and effeminate. In early 20th-century British writings on Xizang, there was a prevalent theme of contrasting the East and the West, characterized by disdain and discrimination against the Xizangs. In these works, descriptions of Xizang were inseparable from three key adjectives: ignorant, barbaric, and dirty.

"Ignorant" was the most significant label that colonizers attached to Xizangs. The colonialists, considering themselves as advocates of rationality and civilization, did not conceal their contempt for Xizang religious beliefs and cultural arts due to their sense of superiority. Prayer flags, visible all over Xizang, were colorful flags placed on rooftops, mountain passes, riverbanks, roadsides, and near temples at places believed to have spiritual significance. These prayer flags bore scriptures, and for Xizang Buddhists, the fluttering flags were akin to reciting prayers, conveying people's supplications and good wishes to the gods with each breeze. However, in the eyes of the invaders, these practices seemed absurd: "horse of the wind", as the Xizangs picturesquely call them, imagining that the prayers inscribed on them are to the good god, whoever he may be, who watches their particular fold and fends off intruding spirits as well as material invaders. In fact, the invaders believed that the "good Buddha" cannot stop their progress at all, and these fluttering prayer flags are just a symbol of ignorance.[8]

In the mountains, intersections, lakes and rivers across Xizang, people often see altars made of stones and slates - Mani piles. On these stones and tablets, most of them are engraved with six-character words, discerning eyes, statues of gods or various auspicious patterns. The aggressors actually thought that Xizangs were just building stone piles to kill time: "When a Xizang sees two stones by the roadside, he cannot resist placing one on the top of the other. So wherever one goes the whole countryside is studded with these monuments of wasted labour, erected to propitiate the genii of the place, or from mere force of habit to while away an idle hour." Despite Xizang's rich history of religion and its distinctive cultural heritage, these invaders perceived prayer flags, mani piles, people

reciting scriptures, and the monks in monasteries as objects of scorn."Ignorance" was the most prominent description of early 20th-century Xizang in the eyes of British colonizers.

"Barbaric" was the second label attached to Xizangs by the colonizers. European colonists repeatedly emphasized the "barbaric" aspect of Xizang, citing various forms of torture as the primary basis for accusing Xizangs of being barbaric: "The commonest punishment in Xizang is flogging, but the ordeal is so severe that it often proves fatal.....The natives in Darjeeling have a story of Xizang methods, which have always seemed to me the refinement of cruelty. At Gyantse, they say, the criminal is flung into a dark pit, where he cannot tell whether it is night or day. Cobras and scorpions and reptiles of various degrees of venom are his companion; these he may hear in the darkness, for it is still enough, and seek or avoid as he has courage. Food is sometimes thrown in to tempt any faint-hearted wretch to prolong his agony.

Francis Edward Young husband, a British officer, also mentioned torture in Xizang, such as eye gouging, hand cutting off, and whipping. To the colonialists, this vast land was barren and desolate, a barbarian haunt destined to be despised and cursed by God. Therefore, this vast and desolate land was a territory inhabited by barbarians, who were destined to be despised and cursed by God. Therefore, this wilderness and its "barbarians" should be conquered by civilized people. If the colonizers slaughtered them due to resistance, it was not the fault of the colonizers but rather the result of "the ignorance of the Xizangs". It is their "own responsibility."

"Dirty" was another label that the colonizers attached to Xizangs. It cannot be denied that the works of the colonizers, to some extent, can reflect the social and living conditions in Xizang in the early 20th century, providing valuable references for understanding old Xizang. However, in British writings on Xizang, the positive aspects of Xizang were consistently ignored, while the negative aspects were exaggerated, particularly connecting Xizang with barbarism and emphasizing its dirtiness.

Peter Fleming, in his description of Lhasa, wrote, "It was in fact an insanitary slum. In the pitted streets pools of the rainwater and piles of refuse disrupted the march-discipline of the fusiliers. The Houses were mean and filthy, the stench pervasive. Pigs and ravens competed for nameless delicacies in open sewers." According to Fleming, Xizangs were dirty, women were dirty, and monks were the dirtiest: "In the fort the first thing one meets of a morning is a troop of these grimy sirens, climbing the stars, burdened with buckets of chopped ice and sacks of yak-dung, the two necessities of life."; "For warmth's sake most of the rooms are underground, and in these subterranean dens Xizangs, black as coal-heavers, huddle together with yaks and mules. Xizang women, equally dirty, go about, their faces smeared and blotched with caoutchouc, wearing a red, hoop-like head-dress, ornamented with alternate turquoises and ruby-coloured stones."; "Dirt and religion are inseparable in Xizang. The Lamas themselves are the most filthy and malodorous folk I have met in the country." Dirtiness became a prominent sign of Xizang "uncivilization."

In the colonial discourse system, the East is barbaric, ignorant and dirty, while the West is civilized, progressive and clean. What the colonialists tried to create and publicize was the theory of Western racial excellence and the theory of Western civilization center, and they vilified and despised the Eastern nations. Therefore, in the narrative of the colonists, the backward side of the colonized colonies is constantly strengthened, and the backwardness gradually occupies the whole narrative space and becomes the focus of the narrative. And the good side of the colony weakens as the backward side strengthens, until it disappears.

The post-structuralist critic Michel Foucault once pointed out that discourse and power are always combined, forming a mutually constitutive relationship. Discourse is fundamentally rooted in the surge of power, and there is no such thing as neutral or objective knowledge. Considering the context of colonialism, one can infer that discourses related to colonialism are products of the mechanisms of imperial power. Imperial power determines the discursive violence imposed on the colonized, which in turn maintains, promotes and strengthens the operation of imperial power, and consolidates the system itself. Within this larger framework, works like *The Unveiling of Lhasa*,

Bayonets to Lhasa and The British Empire and Xizang, do not escape the discourse logic of imperialism. They are imbued with the language of imperial violence, where conscious or unconscious biases uphold and legitimize the act of colonization. It can be said that the British writings on Xizang in the early 20th century were unable to break free from the discourse of colonialism, and it became an organic part of the imperial discourse.

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