



Tibetan Lives: Three Himalayan Autobiographies

Peter Richardus

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In the early years of the 20th century, control over Tibet was contested by three major empires: those of China, Russia and Britain. The imperial powers and those who came in their wake - missionaries, scholars, traders and soldiers - employed local staff to assist in their dealings with the Tibetans, and these employees were in the vanguard of Tibet's encounter with the outside world. Yet they have been largely forgotten by history and most of the knowledge and understandings that they gained have been lost.

It was left to a Dutchman, Johan van Manen, and hence an outside observer of the British imperial system, to preserve the impressions of three who served on the periphery of the imperial system. The three autobiographies that make up this book, crowded with ethnographical, sociological and historico-religious data, offer a unique insight into the world of the intermediary class. In addition to being interesting and entertaining, they are an important contribution to our understanding of the history of Tibet and its opening up to cultures beyond its own.

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