

# *A Brief Introduction to Joseph Rock's Influence on Spreading Naxi Culture*

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**Abstract:** Naxi-ology is the study of the Naxi minority, the rise of Naxi-ology has been going on for more than a hundred years. The main research object of Naxi-ology is the living environment of the Naxi people, ethnography, the mode of life, and the national religion and so on, which is also the key factor of Naxi becoming one of the developed ethnic minorities. This paper studies the process of the American scholar—Joseph Rock's study of Naxi minority in China, and analyses Rock's Naxi cultural monographs during his staying in Lijiang between 1922 and 1949 according to the data shown in the Harvard University Library. This paper also objectively evaluates the influences of Rock's monographs and literatures he collected on the study of the Naxi culture by other scholars and highly praises his contribution on spreading Naxi culture to the world.

## 1. Introduction

The Naxi minority is a nation with a long history. Two thousand years' reproduction, survival and development have formed a living area with Lijiang at the center of the border of three provinces of Yunnan, Tibet and Sichuan. In the long river of history, Naxi has developed its own unique culture—Naxi culture. For more than a hundred years, Naxi-ology (In English, the study of YiJing can be written in Yi-ology, the study of the novel *A Dream in Red Mansions* can be written in Red-ology, therefore, the study of Naxi minority can be written in Naxi-ology for abbreviation ) which takes Naxi culture as its core and backbone has become an international subject by the collection, arrangement and in-depth study of the ancient Naxi hieroglyphics and books by experts and scholars at home and abroad. One of the most influential scholars working on Naxi culture is Joseph Rock, who was considered as the “Father of Naxi Studies”.

As one of the founders of the study of Naxi culture, Joseph Rock devoted a great deal of time and energy to the ethnographic collection, translation, annotation and collation of **Dongba Scripture** (Dongba Scripture refers to the Scripture of Dongba religion—an original religion of the Naxi minority; It is a scripture written and chanted by Dongba. The scripture is written in a thick cotton paper (commonly known as Dongba paper) made from the skin of a local woody plant. The writing tools include ink made from pot ash mixed with bile and homemade bamboo pens.), on the basis of which he compiled and published a dictionary serving the interpretation and reading of Dongba Scripture. At the same time he also worked on the study of writing Dongba Scripture, that is the Dongba hieroglyphics, he has made fruitful achievements from the foundation of the basic

theory of discipline to the construction of Dongba culture, which has laid a solid foundation for further in-depth study of Dongba culture in academic circles.

## 2. Joseph Rock's Achievements on Naxi-ology, Naxi Language, and Spreading Naxi Culture

### 2.1 Joseph Rock's Research Process of Studying Naxi-ology

Born in Austria in 1884, Joseph Rock was able to study Chinese by himself at the age of 13. Joseph Rock arrived in New York by ship in 1905 and Hawaii the following year. Super linguistic talent enabled him to master seven languages, such as English, Arabic, German and so on without any difficulty in communication and reading. He joined American citizenship in 1911 and began his research. At first he studied botany, and by 1919 he had published three books and 45 essays on botany. Botanical achievements made him highly valued by the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), which sent Joseph Rock to Southeast Asia in 1920 in search of the maple tree.

In 1922, Joseph Rock came to the southwest of China and settled down in Lijiang. It wasn't long before he became a friend with the locals because of his language talent. Since he was finally supported by the USDA, he even made lots of local aristocrats. Whenever going out to collect specimens, he employed a large number of locals as guides. Under the guidance of the locals, the collection of data went on smoothly so that he could return to the United States successfully in 1924. Not only did he bring specimens back to the United States, but also a large amount of image data.

Due to the excellent completion of the task assigned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Joseph Rock returned to Lijiang at the end of 1924 with a large amount of funding for scientific research and changed his research subjects from botany to Naxi culture. He rented a cabin in Jade Lake Village and hired a local **Dongba** (Dongba in Naxi refers to the traditional religious clergy, symbolizing the "wise men" and the most senior intellectuals of the Naxi nationality. They are the main inheritors of Dongba culture) to teach him Naxi language. During this period Joseph Rock made a detailed study of the folk sacrificial rituals, history and hieroglyphics of Naxi minority and collected a large number of classical literatures.

On his return to Lijiang, Joseph Rock brought in a large number of photo negatives from the United States and began contributing manuscripts to National Geographic magazine, during this period he took a large number of humanities geographic photographs. It is the continued presence of these photographs and transcripts in National Geographic magazine that make these precious images well preserved nowadays.

It was not until 1935 that Joseph Rock formally ended his contract agreement with National Geographic magazine and began to concentrate on Naxi culture. Joseph Rock made a deeper study and excavation of Naxi language and culture by communicating with the local Naxi people during his study. Ten years later, Joseph Rock finally completed his first monograph about Naxi culture *A Naxi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary*, which was now preserved in Harvard University Library.

With the invitation of the U.S. Military Department in 1944, Joseph Rock returned to the United States for drawing the map of the Hump Route. In 1946, Joseph Rock returned to Lijiang again. But not for long, when People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, Joseph Rock flew back to the United States with a great deal of Naxi literatures he had collected.

On December 5, 1962, Rock died of heart failure at the home of Loy Max, Honolulu at the age of 79. Rock's residence was well preserved in current Max's house with a grave and a tombstone erected nearby.

### 2.2 Joseph Rock's Achievements in Naxi-ology

During 27 years' stay in Lijiang from 1922 to 1949, Joseph Rock devoted a great deal of energy

to the study of Naxi-ology. He was collecting a large number of Naxi cultural classics with money and energy, carrying out a detailed study of these classics, and writing a total of 18 works about Naxi culture:

Table 1 presents Joseph Rock's 18 Journals/Books Related to Naxi Culture

Table 1 Joseph Rock's 18 Journals/Books Related to Naxi Culture<sup>[1]</sup>

Number	Name	Journal/book
1	Exorcism Ceremony held by Indigenous Naxi in the Hinterland of Yunnan Province, China	American Geographic Journal, Vol. 46
2	Huang Lama: National Geographical Society explorers visit Exotic Muli outside the Snowy Mountains of Lijiang, Yunnan Province, China	American Geographic Journal, Vol. 47
3	The Story of the Flood in the Literature of Naxi Minority (Abridged Translation)	Journal of the West China Frontier Research Association Vol.7
4	The Origin of Naxi Wizards' Divination Scripture (Abridged Translation)	Journal of the West China Frontier Research Association Vol.8
5	The Study of Naxi Literature	Journal of the French Far East, Vol. 37, No. 1. Offprint
6	The Birth and Origin of Dopa God, Founder of Shamanism (Complete Translation of the Origin of Divination)	Art bu Asiae, Vol.7
7	A Collection of Nicholas' Manuscripts by the American Geographic Association	Reviews of Geosciences, Vol. 27
8	Yongning People and Their Religious Documents	Journal of Furen, Vol. 3, No. 1
9	A love story of Kamakumiji (Translated from the Naxi Love story of Naxi Hieroglyphics Manuscripts.)	Journal of the French far East, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Translated and Annotated in Henei in 1940)
10	"The Ancient Naxi Kingdom in Southwest China"	Harvard Yanjing Monographs, Vol.8
11	The Sacrifice Ceremony or the Sacrifice Pursued by the Naxi People (From Sacrifice Scripture)	"Journal of Furen", Vol. 8
12	The Naxi people's NaJia Worship and their Related Rituals	"The Series of Roman Orient " Vol. 4
13	The Special Relationship Between Naxi Burial Custom and the Origin of Naxi Weapons	"Human" Vol. 50
14	The Naxi People's Funeral Rituals in Southwest China	Published in Vienna in 1955
15	The Life and Culture of Naxi Nationality in the Tibetan Frontier of China	Published in Wiesbaden in 1963
16	The Naxi Hieroglyphics Categories of Eastern Manuscripts collected by Germany	Published in Germany in 1965
17	The Expression of Naxi Culture in its Literature: a Dictionary of Encyclopedia	Published in Rome, Italy, in 1972
18	A Naxi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary	"The Series of Roman Orient " Vol. 28

(Cited and Translated from Mu Jiyuan's journal)

As shown in Table 1, Joseph Rock was very productive in the study of Naxi culture. Among all these publications, *the Ancient Naxi Kingdom in Southwest China* and *A Naxi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary* are the most well-known books in the world. Particularly, the first book published in 1947 recording a large number of mountains and river landforms, customs, coupled with a lot of beautiful pictures of Lijiang area, is more famous and has then been hailed by western scholars as "A Guidebook to Travel in Lijiang".

### 2.3 Joseph Rock's Achievements in the Study of Naxi Language

*A Naxi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary* is another achievement of Joseph Rock made in Naxi-ology. As we all know, Naxi minority is an ancient descendant of Qiang, their culture was rarely influenced by Qin dynasty's language policy "Books with the same characters and vehicles with the same track", therefore the characters created by Naxi—Dongba hieroglyph kept their unique way of writing. Joseph Rock, who was gifted in language learning, has been interested in the unique language from the moment he set foot on the land of Lijiang. Around 1923, recommended by a guide, Joseph Rock began to learn Naxi language by paying homage to several old Dongba teachers. After several years of hard work, he knew the language very well and could even begin to translate the Dongba Scripture, which led to his tremendous achievements in studying Naxi culture.

Influenced by the world economic crisis in 1929, Joseph Rock, due to the lack of funds for scientific research, had to return to the United States. During this period, because the poor economic status and lot of time spending on lobby with related associations made his study of Naxi culture drop to a low point. In 1931, tired Joseph Rock returned to Lijiang and devoted himself to studying Naxi culture again. Ten years later, he finally completed his first monograph manuscript about Naxi culture *A Naxi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Unfortunately in 1944, a warship carrying his manuscripts and a large number of Naxi classics was shot sunk in the Pacific Ocean, and all the resources and materials he collected and wrote were buried in the sea. After hearing the news, Joseph Rock once thought to commit suicide, because he devoted all his saving and energy to compiling and collecting the materials related to Naxi culture in the past ten decades. Later, Joseph Rock was finally able to go back to Lijiang with the help of Serge, who was the director of Yanjing Research Institute of Harvard University in the United States, deciding to fund the rewriting and publication of *A Naxi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary*. But because it was the New China founded period, Joseph Rock as an American, had to return to the United States, which caused the writing of the book to be dragged over and over again, and it was not until the last minute of his life in 1962 that Joseph Rock finally completed the book. The manuscript was first published in 1963 and the second volume was published in 1972. Josef Rock, the language genius, finally drew a successful period for his Naxi study.

The publication of *A Naxi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary* marks Naxi language's debut in western language system. The dictionary contains 3414 hieroglyphics interpreted in English and more than 4600 words commonly used for divination and sacrifice. It opened a convenient door for western scholars to study Naxi culture.

### 2.4 The Influence of Naxi Literatures Collected by Joseph Rock on the Study of Naxi-ology in the World

Living in Lijiang for 27 years, Joseph Rock probably collected the largest number of Naxi classics, because he has been using research funds to buy large quantities of Naxi classics at very low prices and send them back to the United States. Luckily he was also a skilled man in the collation of the literature and very good at systematizing the literatures. First of all, he used scientific research funds to invite the Naxi translators to classify the collected books of Dongba Scriptures and divide them into different categories through the Scriptures that need to be read by the Dongba in sacrificial ceremony. Then, according to the order in which the Scriptures were read at each ceremony, he listed the corresponding catalogues so as not to miss the collection of any Dongba Scriptures, with each of which had the name of the ceremony attached to it, and finally put serial numbers he collected on the categories. After such arrangement, the book can be finally stored in the library.

Some of the books Joseph Rock had collected are unique and classic. In a book entitled *Culture and Life of the Naxi people on the Border between China and Tibet*, he mentioned a copy of the Dongba Scripture written during the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty, which was one of the most precious. However, because of the war and other irresistible factors, the Naxi ancient books collected by him were not preserved as a whole, some were buried in the sea, while others were distributed all around the world. "

According to Klaus Ludwig Janert, a German scholar, said in the preface of the book *the Naxi Handwritten Catalogue* : "About 4000 copies have been sold to individuals, about 1000 copies of the Dongba Scriptures have been sold to the Library of Congress of the United States, about 1000 copies were sold to Yanjing Library of Harvard University, about 25 copies were given to his own friends, 15 books about Divination were stolen from China's publishing department, and 1115 copies of the original and duplicate copies of the Dongba Scripture were sold to the German Library of Marburg." Of course, these are not all of his collections, there are some of the Scriptures being collected privately, among which Ms. Hereeson has more than 3500 copies, and there are a small number of Scriptures flowing to different places.

## 2.5 Joseph Rock's Influence on Spreading Naxi-ology

Once The book *Lama, Princes, and bandits: Joseph Rock's Photographs of the Tibetan Borderlands of China*, was published by the Chinese Museum of Art in New York in 1992, which has shocked the whole world. The photographs, taken by Joseph Rock 60 years ago showing the beautiful mountains and rivers from the Chinese border Tibet area, were presented in front of the whole world, those photos were like vivid travelling archives guiding you the beautiful sceneries of Tibetan borderlands. At the same time China was at its early stage of reform and opening up, a large number of Western scholars, tourists and travelers follow the footsteps of the book to travel in Lijiang. It is clear that Lijiang being known by the world stems from the ingenious work of Joseph Rock, the great scholar, who introduced Naxi culture, Dongba Scriptures, Naxi hieroglyph to the world. Needless to say, under the special historical conditions of old China, Joseph Rock took away a large number of valuable cultural relics of Naxi, which was indeed a big loss for the treasure House of the China.

However, Joseph Rock's contribution to the spreading and development of Naxi culture to the West was outstanding, which established indelible merits in the treasure house of the world cultural heritage of the Naxi people. Just as the western scholar S.B. Sutton (1988) evaluated: "Not only did Rock not evade the responsibility of the natural sciences, but also carried the burden of studying the social sciences. He viewed his Naxi friends with an academic eye. Although he was not the first Westerner to come and live in Naxi ethnic group, he was one of the first scholars evaluating Naxi culture and speculating that Naxi culture would eventually be swallowed or became extinct. He was the only western scholar who studies the Naxi culture in an all-round way."<sup>[2]</sup>

## 3. Conclusion

It must be said that the rise of Naxi-ology in the world benefited from Joseph Rock's tireless pursuit of Naxi-ology, his scattered academic achievements are the flowers of Naxi culture in all parts of the world. It is a miracle that Dongba Scripture, which has been lost from overseas, has been able to survive after all the ups and downs. These documents and classics will work as stars guiding the direction for the other Naxi cultural researchers. After 1949, especially since 1980, a large number of foreign scholars have come to Lijiang to visit this magical land in the footsteps of his predecessors and conducting linguistic, anthropological, religious and artistic studies on the Naxi-Dongba culture, which has made Naxi-ology become an international discipline. All these

academic influences can be attributed to Joseph Rock— the father of Naxi-ology.

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