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A French philosopher's love affair with Tibet

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Sonia Bressler[Chinatibetnews.com]

"I hope to have the opportunity to return to Tibet, so I can listen to more beautiful stories," says Sonia Bressler, a golden-haired French philosopher and author, as she recounts her longing for Tibet in an interview with Xinhua News Agency.

On the back cover of her book titled *Journey to the Heart of Tibet*, Bressler writes: Penetrating Tibet is in enjoying the white clouds, the blue sky, and the stars within your grasp; it is in encountering the people of the plateau, smiling at one another, and laughing at your own ignorance.

In the summer of 2007, Bressler experienced her first intimate encounter with Tibet with friends.

Bressler recalls her first trip to Tibet: "It was a strange journey. The first impression Tibet left me with was a somewhat complicated one. The altitude there is 4,000 meters, almost the height of Mont Blanc. I didn't know how one should live there; at the same time, the scenery made me feel intoxicated. The distance between the people and the sky is so close that the clouds appear within grasp. We just rushed through Tibet, though. For me, I did not consider it a complete trip. However, some of my old ideas about Tibet had already begun to soften."

In the winter of 2012, filled with thoughts of affection and a desire to delve deeper into Tibet, Bressler came back. This time she traveled by train, and the developments and changes she saw made her ecstatic.

"I found that everything was moving in the right direction. Within China's environment of continuous development, Tibet is also experiencing its own development. I couldn't even imagine the changes in technical conditions and social environment that I saw." Bressler said she was amazed by the recent developments in Tibet.

On this second trip, Bressler had an even more intimate contact with Tibet. She talked with Tibetan doctors, Buddhist monks, and pilgrims. She visited the Tibet Museum and experienced traditional Tibetan culture. She visited Tibetan schools, nursing homes, businesses, residential homes, and experienced the life of the local people. This single trip gave her countless,

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unforgettable stories.

And as she talks about her Tibet stories, Bressler gets caught up in her memories: from asking her why foreign countries tend to discredit China's train conductors, chat about her entrepreneurial business sense, praise the nursing homes for Tibetan elderly ...

From all this, what undoubtedly gave her the deepest impression was a 65-year-old Tibetan man. Bressler used to imagine that many Tibetan elderly would die while begging on the road. But she found this Tibetan elderly man described his life: "The nursing home I live in has everything. I'm living in such a comfortable place, eating Tibetan food, living in a warm environment, with a doctor by my side. This is the era now. Without these conditions, I could not live in the present age. The life here is comfortable, very quiet. I like the mountains here, the village, the tea, the food, and the service, my neighbors who love to sing songs."

When her second trip to Tibet came to an end, Bressler found she had many memorable stories to tell. After nearly a year of hurried writing, she published *Journey to the Heart of Tibet* in French. Today, the book has been translated into Mandarin and English.

In Bressler' opinion, the French and other Europeans do not fully understand China or southwest China's Tibet, with the reason being "they do not want to verify the information that they hear."

In the course of communication with the West, China has already made a lot of efforts. In future, China will need to focus attention on the younger generations, since they are the hope of the future. Bressler says, aside from being able to return to Tibet in the future, she also hopes to discover more of China. She believes that the Chinese government's proposal to build the "Silk Road Economic Belt" will not only establish ties across beautiful landscapes, but will also promote mutually profitable cooperation between China and its neighboring and European countries.



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