

# ASIA

**CHINESE PAINTING**

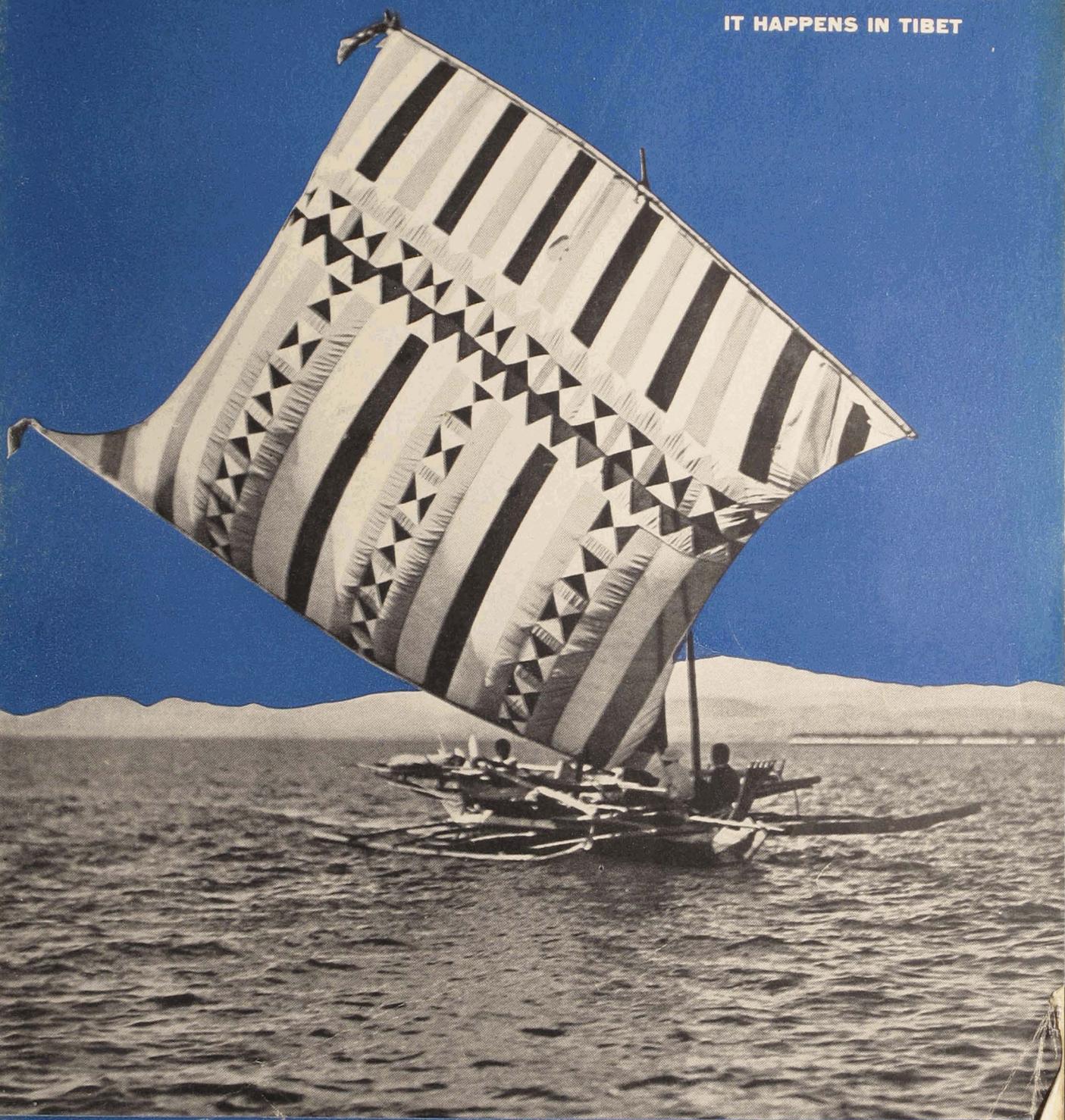
*by HU SHIH*

**PALESTINE PLEDGES BROKEN**

**JAPAN ALONE IS NO THREAT**

**SOUTH SEAS FACE DESTINY**

**IT HAPPENS IN TIBET**



# TIBETAN BORDER INTRIGUE

By ALEXANDRA DAVID-NEEL

WAR appears to have something of the nature of epidemics; its immaterial "germs"—or, perhaps, germs made of such attenuated matter as to escape our investigations—spread across continents, producing sudden outbursts of homicidal madness in regions that Nature seems to have fashioned for immutable serenity.

Distant as I am from the struggles that are staining Europe with blood, I am still far from being surrounded by peace here in Tatsienlu (or Kangting, as it is now generally called) in the picturesque country of Kam, over which the Chinese government is at present trying to intensify its hold. The inhabitants of this mountainous Tibetan-border district are for the most part of a bellicose disposition; in default of real war they resort to brigandage as to a sport befitting "mighty-hearted braves." Now, recently, a fraction of these "braves"—followers of the late Panchen Lama of Tibet, many of whom were escorting him homeward from his long years of exile in China at the time of his death three years ago—have allowed themselves to be led into a mad and foolish adventure, and today they are suffering severely from its unfortunate consequences. It was an amazing affair, in which the rallying symbols were the mummified body of Tibet's Precious Protector and his possible reincarnation in a little child not yet discovered.

In order to arrive at the real beginning of the chain of circumstances that has led to this curious drama, it is necessary to go back almost thirty years to the defeat, by the Tibetans, of the army sent against them by their Chinese suzerains and the consequent departure from Lhasa, in 1912, of the Chinese *Amban*. This break with China was, however, far from obtaining the unanimous approval of the Tibetan population. It was with regret that many saw British influence taking the place of the influence China had discreetly exercised in Tibet for centuries. Among the "pro-Chinese" was an eminent personage almost equal in rank and dignity to the Dalai Lama or ruler of the country—namely, the *Panchen rinpoche*, Grand Lama of the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery and sovereign, at least nominally, of the vast province of Tsang.

Sheltering behind his Buddhist convictions, which forbade killing, the Panchen Lama, or Tashi Lama, as he is often called, had refused to raise troops in his territory to fight against the Chinese; a proceeding for which the Dalai Lama never forgave him.

By 1916, when, as a western student of Lamaism, I had the unique privilege of visiting the Panchen Lama in his palace at Shigatse, capital of Tsang, political intrigues had already envenomed the dispute between the two Grand Lamas. Some seven years later, the Panchen Lama, having been invited in imperative fashion to take up his residence in a house built by the Dalai Lama in the neighborhood of Lhasa, and feeling, rightly or wrongly, that an attempt against his life was planned, fled to China. The Chinese government gave the eminent refugee a warm welcome. In his person, held by the faithful of Tibet to be more than divine, it saw an instrument that might prove of use in regaining ascendancy over the "Land of Snows."

The Panchen Lama's exile lasted for about fifteen years. China lavishly entertained him and, with him, the veritable army of people who, a few at a time, arrived from Tibet to join him. As a place of residence he was given the immense Southern Park which, with its large lakes and numerous groups of dwellings, had formed part of the Imperial Forbidden City in Peking. He wandered about it in a sedan chair or went into the town driving in a luxurious yellow-gold motor car, and, on returning home, he listened to concerts given by his private band of musicians with silver instruments.

However, the Panchen Lama was not content with this sybaritic life. The man who, when I was his guest at Shigatse, had seemed to be a peaceful scholar, had since become an ambitious politician. He had conceived the idea—or it had been suggested to him by members of his suite—of reconquering, by force, the province of Tsang and becoming not merely its nominal sovereign, as in the past, but its real ruler, quite independent of the Lhasa government.

From then on, a vast organization was built up. In many places throughout China, "offices" of the Panchen Lama were established. Their

character was truly eastern, that is to say, complex and vague. In buildings, here large, there more modest, sometimes bought with the funds belonging to the Panchen Lama, sometimes presented by pious donors or lent by the Chinese government, a few officials of the Lama's Court installed themselves. Provided with money, they trafficked—for no Tibetan can refrain from trading—on the understanding that the profits of their deals were to fill the Panchen Lama's coffers, although actually, according to the time-honored custom of Tibet, most of these profits went into private coffers. The important thing was to accumulate arms and munitions, which were to be sent, at some indefinite time, toward the Tibetan frontier to be distributed to the troops who would precede the Panchen Lama and pave the way for his return.

Meanwhile, on December 17, 1933, the Dalai Lama died. The moment appeared favorable for the success of the Panchen Lama's plans. The veneration which the Tibetans usually divided between the two Grand Lamas had then only one object and was bound to be given wholly to the Panchen Lama. The Regent and his ministers would probably have found difficulty in combating the fanatical fervor of the population upon the return of the "Precious Protector" whose august presence assures the country's fertility and the prosperity of its inhabitants, preserving them from all misfortunes. Why did the Panchen Lama and his followers let several years go by without taking the decisive step? It was hardly before 1936 that they began seriously to plan their return to Tibet. Those about the Lama looked forward to certain success, with the aid of a Chinese army, which, if opposition should be shown, was to supplement the few thousands of men composing the Lama's own troops. They never doubted that this help would be given them. Only, while they were still dallying, events turned against them. The Japanese aggression of July, 1937, impelled the Chinese to use all their military force against the invaders and to withdraw their attention from any projects concerning Tibet.

A strong escort—not an army—was given to the Panchen Lama when he finally left for his own country. Few as were their number, the Lhasa government did not relish the prospect of the intrusion of these armed Chinese into its territory. It was conveyed to the Lama that he would be welcomed with the deepest respect and was at liberty to return to his estate in Tsang, but that the Chinese soldiers who accompanied him were not to cross the frontier. I have been told that he showed himself disposed to accede

to this condition, but that the Chinese did not permit him to start without them. He was detained at Jakyendo, a Chinese military outpost in southern Chinghai Province (or Kokonor) and settled himself in the picturesque lamasery that dominates the village. I can imagine him there, waiting—who knows for what?—looking from his windows at the road that leads to Tibet, as I had often gazed at it myself during my long stay at Jakyendo years ago, when I was planning my own journey to Lhasa. But the Panchen Lama was not to see Lhasa again, nor his palace at Shigatse, where he had once so cordially welcomed me. He died, in Jakyendo, in November, 1937.

Up to the present time his body has been debarred from the magnificent mausoleum to which the Panchen Lamas have a right, in the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, and has passed through a series of curious adventures, which, even now, are probably not yet at an end.

Deprived of their chief, the band of exiled Tibetans no longer seemed able to serve China's political schemes. All the same, Chinese politicians doubtless thought it wise to have an eye to the future. For, like the Dalai Lamas and other "*tulkus*" of lesser rank, the Panchen or Tashi Lamas do not die. A newborn child would be considered the reincarnation of the deceased Lama and, as such, would enjoy all the prerogatives of his predecessor and provoke the same devout enthusiasm among the Tibetans. If such a child were cleverly managed, he might become an instrument as useful to the Chinese as the late Panchen Lama could have been—even more so, because for a long time there would be no danger that he would interfere with the plans that would be built up around him.

Whether this was their thought or whether they were ruled by other motives, the Chinese continued to grant subsidies to the followers of the deceased Lama. His body was taken from Jakyendo to Kanze, a town situated farther back in Chinese territory, and preserved there seated cross-legged, in the posture of meditation, in a case filled with salt. This process, which leads to the desiccation of the tissues, is often employed in Asia for mummifying the remains of great religious personages. The salt absorbs the liquid produced by the putrefaction of the flesh and is replaced as soon as it begins to become wet. It is then sold to devotees, who pay a high price for it and use it as medicine.

Among the Tibetans scattered in the many "offices" of the late Panchen Lama, quarrels now arose. The bigwigs among them were accused of appropriating nearly the whole of the funds

granted by the Chinese government and of leaving the small fry—secretaries, clerks, soldiers and servants—in misery. The majority of the latter, forming a discontented and tumultuous cohort of a few thousand men, had been quartered at Kanze, where the body of their Lord, reposing in its bath of salt and surrounded by hundreds of butter-burning lamps, was entertained, several times a day, by concerts given by his musicians with their silver instruments.

At Tatsienlu, where the Panchen Lama's chief ex-satellites had come to reside or to make short sojourns, I had renewed acquaintance with some of those whom I had previously met at Shigatse, and I noticed the growing disorganization of what was pompously termed the "Government of the Panchen Lama."

A reincarnation of the Panchen Lama might have given back life and importance to this dying "government." A certain Lamaist dignitary, good-naturedly skeptical, as are the majority of the dignitaries of all churches, advised the courtiers of the deceased Lama to make haste to find him a successor. Any little boy of sufficiently poor and humble origin, so that his parents could be satisfied with a liberal allowance and otherwise be set aside, would meet the need. To stage the peculiar "signs" that would designate the child as incarnating the spirit of the Panchen Lamas presented no difficulty. I do not know why this wise counsel was not immediately followed. Perhaps the rivalry in play prevented it; for several individuals wished to claim for themselves the discovery of the new incarnation.

Quite recently, it was announced that the Panchen Lama had reincarnated himself in Kokonor, but the claim has not yet been formally accepted. In any case, this "reincarnation" has manifested itself too late to serve very effectively the interests of the people of the deceased Panchen Lama; for the reincarnated Dalai Lama—also a native of Kokonor—was solemnly installed in Lhasa, on February 22, 1940, in the presence of delegates of the Chinese government, and most likely it will be upon this young boy that China will now concentrate its attention.

It was thus an ill-selected moment, when discord and disorder reigned among them, which some of the officials of the Panchen Lama's band chose for launching their late master's troops into a mad adventure.

At Kanze lived Detchen Wangmo, a descendant of Genghis Khan and heiress of the *gyalpos*, or "kings," of the country. Although these had been deprived of the greater part of their possessions and of their power, the Princess

still retained some rights over the region and occupied the fortress-palace that stands in the Kanze valley. When I was staying in Kanze some years ago, Detchen Wangmo was still a child. After her father's death, she "reigned" under the regency of her uncle, a lama. While yet very young, she was given for husband a Prince of Derge—a district not far from Kanze.

Some time after the wedding Detchen Wangmo's husband had to go to Lhasa on business. The journey is long and the Prince was absent for more than a year. It appears that his wife could not stand the solitude; when the Prince neared Derge, he learned that Detchen Wangmo had put a substitute in his place, in the person of a member of the lower clergy, and that she was pregnant. Tibetans are little inclined to become dramatic over incidents of this kind. Detchen Wangmo's husband contented himself with staying on his own estate, and never saw his unfaithful wife again.

The ex-monk, raised to the rank of Prince-Consort, speedily made himself hateful to the people by his despotic manners, and was murdered.

Her widowhood soon palled on Detchen Wangmo. She noticed a Tibetan belonging to a noble family of the Panchen Lama's old province of Tsang and wished to marry him. Her choice pleased her subjects, but for political reasons it displeased the Chinese Governor of Sikang Province, in which the district of Kanze has been incorporated. He forbade the marriage.

At that time the people of the late Panchen Lama were supposed to be attempting to set up a semi-independent state as a fief of the future Panchen Lamas, in place of their old domain of Tsang, which they hoped, also, to recover and add to the new state. The regency of this state, which would include that part of Sikang Province which is inhabited by Tibetan tribes, the Kokonor region (Chinghai Province) and probably some territories around Derge, would be entrusted to the Princess of Kanze and her proposed husband and, later, to their descendants, the Panchen Lamas being personages too lofty to busy themselves with material cares.

The Governor of Sikang saw in this plan a menace to the Chinese influence which it was his duty to strengthen among the Tibetans of the western frontier. So, in spite of the reiterated requests that were presented to him, he persisted in his refusal to permit the marriage.

The *pourparlers* dragged on for a long time. For ill-defined reasons, the Princess was deprived of her rights and expelled from her palace in Kanze. Soon after this, the people of the Panchen Lama rashly decided to fight. The

Chinese authorities in Sikang took up the challenge and sent troops over the mountain ranges that dominate Tatsienlu. This was in the early months of 1940. From my cabin I watched the regiments defile along the path. Some braggarts cried as they passed, "We are going to kill the savages!" A great feeling of pity rose in me on seeing these boys from the hot plains, insufficiently clad, mounting towards the snowy passes the altitude of which is more than 13,000 feet.

The cold killed a good number of them. The Tibetans, also, killed not a few; but the dead among the Tibetans were still more numerous. Defections contributed to their defeat. Some tribes that had promised to join the insurgents did not move. The head of a monastery in the region of Bathang handed over to the Chinese the delegates deputed to ask him to induce his Tibetan vassals to support the revolt.

Incidents multiplied. A group of belligerents entrenched in the castle of the Princess were besieged and compelled to surrender for lack of water. On both sides the soldiers looted with zeal, according to the habit of Easterners.

Some Chinese troops shut in with their booty on one of the upper floors of a lamasery were burned alive and their treasures reduced to cinders. Here a miracle happened—for miracles were not lacking during this adventure. During the night the ground floor took fire, though nobody was in the rooms, the doors were bolted and sentinels mounted guard outside the building. With unusual rapidity the flames spread to the upper stories and surprised the sleeping soldiers when escape was no longer possible. From the apparent impossibility of any one's having entered the place and started the fire, the Tibetans concluded that it must have been the work of one of the genii, protector of the Panchen Lama's possessions, who had punished those who had dared to steal a part of them.

Then some high officials, sent by the Chinese government, started for Kanze. I saw them being carried in sedan chairs covered with yellow satin on the same path that their soldiers had trodden some weeks before, with bare feet clad in straw sandals. The Tibetans who occupied Kanze have since contended that these envoys asked them to evacuate the town, promising them to settle their "difference." What "difference"? This has never been clearly explained.

The project of forming a Tibetan state independent of the Lhasa government, over which the future Panchen Lamas would reign under the distant and purely nominal control of China, was discussed only among the important followers of the late Grand Lama. The common

run of them thought it was merely a matter of lusty fighting and plundering while reestablishing Princess Detchen Wangmo in her former position. She, in order to avoid being led a prisoner to Tatsienlu, had fled into Chinghai.

While killing and parleys were going on in Kanze, the few officials of the Panchen's band who remained at Tatsienlu were imprisoned in their homes; sentinels posted at their doors forbade access to visitors. Most of the prisoners' possessions—houses, arms, money, horses, cattle and so on—were seized.

Moreover, during the time the Tibetans were evacuating Kanze, as they had been requested to do, the Sikang troops reentered the town. The Panchen Lama's people believed themselves to be the victims of a dishonest stratagem. Surprised by the sudden arrival of the Chinese soldiers and finding no support from among the tribes of the region, they fled precipitately, abandoning their arms, merchandise, provisions, all that part of the Panchen Lama's property and the property of the richest of his followers which happened to be deposited at Kanze or in the vicinity. As for the Grand Lama's body, impregnated with salt and desiccated, it was hastily packed up in a leather sack, placed on a mule and in this grisly comic manner brought back to Jakyendo, where the Precious Protector had expired about three years before.

The defeat and ruin of the Grand Lama's band were complete. According to the Tibetans, these had been presaged by certain bad omens—for instance, some crows had ruthlessly torn to pieces the Panchen Lama's flag which was floating above his "office" at Tatsienlu.

Of the historic movement begun in 1923 with the flight of the Panchen Lama and continued, in magnificence, in China, all that remains is some unfortunate and impoverished Tibetans, who accuse one another of having conceived the idea of the wild enterprise of Kanze and of having pressed the Lama's soldiers into it. A few of those who were formerly the highest dignitaries of the Lama's Court still receive Chinese government subsidies, but it seems evident that their political usefulness is about at an end. A marked *rapprochement* has been effected between the Chinese government and the government of Tibet. Recently, the Chinese Ministry of Tibetan Affairs has again become very active. With the consent of the Tibetan government it keeps agents in Lhasa, and there is talk of returning the body of the Panchen Lama in great pomp to Tashi Lhunpo as a token of friendship, with official envoys of China presiding at the solemn removal.