

# Heart



# of Asia

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**I**s the heart of Asia beating? Or has it been suffocated by the sands?

From the Brahmaputra to the Irtysh, from the Yellow River to the Caspian Sea, from Mukden to Arabia—everywhere are terrible, merciless waves of sand. The cruel Taklamakan is a threatening extreme of lifelessness, deadening the central part of Asia. Under moving sands, the old Imperial Chinese road hides itself. Out of sandy hills, trunks of a once mighty forest lift their seared arms. Like deformed skeletons, the age-devoured walls of ancient cities stretch along the road.

Perhaps near this very spot passed the great travelers, the migrating nations. The eye, here and there, glimpses isolated kereksurs, menhirs, cromlechs, and rows of stones—silent guardians of ancient cults.

The extremities of Asia, to be sure, wage a gigantic struggle with the ocean tides. But is Asia's heart alive? When a Hindu yogi arrests his pulse, his heart still continues its inner functions. So, too, the heart of Asia. In oases, in yurts, in caravans, dwells an unusual thought. The masses of people, entirely isolated from the outside world, who receive some distorted message of outside events only after a lapse of months, do not die. Each sign of civilization, as we shall see, is greeted by them as a benevolent, long-awaited message. Rather than reject possibilities, they try to adapt their religions to the new conditions of life. This is apparent when we see what the people in the most remote deserts say of the leaders of civilization and humanitarianism.

The name of Ford, for instance, has penetrated into the most remote yurts and provinces.

Amid the sands of the Taklamakan, a long-bearded Moslem asks: "Tell me, could a Ford negotiate the old Chinese road?"

And near Kashgar they ask: "Can a Ford tractor plow our fields?"

In Chinese Urumchi, on the Kalmuck steppes, throughout Mongolia, the word "Ford" is used as a synonym for motive power.

A gray-bearded Old Believer in the wild Altai Mountains, or a youth of the cooperative, says enviously: "In America, you have a Ford. But unfortunately we have none" . . . Or, "If only Ford were here."

Even in the Tibetan highlands, they dream of carrying a Ford in parts, up through the mountain passes.

Crossing powerful streams, they ask: "But could your Ford cross this?"

Ascending steep slopes, they ask again: "And could a Ford also climb up here?"—as if they were speaking of some mythical giant, who can surmount all obstacles.

And another American name has penetrated into the most secluded spots: in a far-away corner of the Altai, in a peasant's hut, in the most venerated corner where the sacred images are kept, one may recognize a familiar face—a yellowish portrait, apparently taken from some stray magazine. Looking closer, you see that it is none other than President Hoover himself.

The Old Believer says: "This is he who feeds the people. Yes, there exist such rare, remarkable persons, who feed not only their own nations, but also others. Yet the mouth of the people is not a small one."

The old man himself had never received an American Relief food package, but the living legend has crossed rivers and mountains, proclaiming how the generous giant kindheartedly distributed food and nourished the nations of the entire world.

One would never expect that news from the outside world could penetrate to the outskirts of Mongolia. But in a forsaken yurt a Mongol again tells you that somewhere beyond the ocean there lives a great man, who feeds all starving people. And he pronounces a name in a rather strange way, sounding somewhat like Hoover or Koovera—the Buddhist Deity of wealth and good fortune. In the most unexpected places, a traveler who has mastered the local language can encounter inspiring legends about the great people working for the good of all.

Through the Rockefeller Institutions, the name of Rockefeller has also reached even far-off cities. With pride and satisfaction, the people speak of their collaboration with these institutions and the way they have been helped by them. The generosity of this American hand has created a direct, widespread feeling of gratitude and friendship.

The fourth outstanding cultural name widely known in the vastness of Asia is that of Senator Borah. A letter from him is regarded as a good passport everywhere. Sometimes in Mongolia, or in the Altai, or in Chinese Turkestan, you may hear a strange pronunciation of this name: "Boria is a powerful man!"

In this way, popular wisdom evaluates the great leaders of our times. This is so valuable to hear. So precious is it to know that human evolution, in unexplainable ways, penetrates the future.

Everywhere, the American flag accompanied us, fastened to a Mongolian spear. It accompanied us through Sinkiang, through the Mongolian Gobi, through Tsaidam and through Tibet. It was our standard during the encounter with the wild Panagis. It greeted the Tibetan governors, princes, and their

generals. Many friends did it meet, and few enemies. And these few were of a special kind: the governor of the northern Tibetan fortress Nag-Chu, who assured us that there were only seven nations in all the world. Another was Ma, the Taotai of Khotan, who was a complete ignoramus and who is renowned for his murders.

But the friends were numerous. If only the West could have seen with what intense interest all photographs of New York skyscrapers were examined, and how hungrily the people listened to our narratives of life in America, it would rejoice to hear how such masses of simple people are attracted to cultural achievements.

Of course in a brief survey we cannot describe in detail the whole of Central Asia. But even in piecemeal fashion, we can still review the present situation of those vast lands and glance at the monuments of a heroic past as well as the untold riches of Asia.

Here as everywhere, on one side you can see remarkable monuments, refined processes of thought based on ancient wisdom and the cordiality of human relationships. You can rejoice at beauty and can easily be understood. But do not be astonished to find, in the very same places, perverted forms of religions, ignorance, and signs of decay and degeneration.

We must see things as they are. Without conventional sentimentality, we must greet the light and justly expose pernicious darkness. We must carefully separate prejudice and superstition from the hidden symbols of ancient knowledge. Let us greet all that aspires towards creation and construction and deplore the barbaric destruction of the treasures of nature and of the spirit.

Of course, as an artist my main aspiration in Asia was towards artistic work, and it is even difficult to estimate how soon I can record all my artistic impressions and sketches—so generous are these gifts of Asia. No knowledge acquired in literature or in museums empowers one to express Asia or any other country, unless one has seen it with his own eyes and has made at least some notes and sketches at the sites themselves. Conviction, this magic and intangible property of creation, comes only in the continuous gathering of real conceptions. It is true, mountains everywhere are mountains, water everywhere is water, sky everywhere is sky, and men everywhere are men. But nevertheless, if seated before the Alps, you attempt to picture the Himalayas, something inexplicable but convincing will be lacking. In addition to its artistic aims, our Expedition planned to study the position of the ancient monuments of Central Asia, to observe the present condition of religions and creeds, and to note the traces of the great migrations of nations. This latter problem has always been of special interest to me. In the latest discoveries of the Koslov expedition, in the works of Professors Rostovtsev, Borovka, Makarenko, Toll and many others, we see the great interest in Scythian, Mongolian, and Gothic antiquities. The ancient discoveries in Siberia, the traces of the great migrations in Minusinsk, Altai,

and Ural, add an extraordinarily rich artistic and historic material to the Pan-European Romanesque and early Gothic. And how close these themes are to present-day artistic creation—many of these animal and floral stylizations could have come from the best modern workshop.



The main route of the Expedition widely encircled Central Asia. The chief points to be mentioned were the following:

Darjeeling, the monasteries of Sikkim, Benares, Sarnath, Northern Punjab, Rawalpindi, Kashmir, Ladakh, Karakorum, Khotan, Yarkend, Kashgar, Aksu, Kuchar, Karashahr, Toksun, the Turfan region, Urumchi, T'ien-Shan, Kozeun, Zaisan, Irtysh, Novonikolaevsk, Biisk, Altai, Oirotia, Verkhneudinsk, Buriatya, Troitskosavsk, Altyn-Bulak, Urga, Yum-Beise, Anhsi-chou, Shih-pao ch'eng, Nanshan, Sharagolji, Tsaidam, Neiji, Marco Polo range, Kokushili, Dungbure, Nagchu, Shentsa-Dzong, Tingri-Dzong, Shekar-Dzong, Kampa-Dzong, Sepo La, Gangtok, and back to Darjeeling.

We crossed the following mountain passes. We have a list of thirty-five passes from fourteen to twenty-one thousand feet:

Zoji La, Khardong La, Karaul Davan, Sasser Pass, Dabzang Pass, Karakorum Pass, Suget Pass, Sanju Pass, Urtu-Kashkariym Daban, Ulan Daban, Chakharin Daban, Khentu Pass, Neiji La, Kokushili Pass, Dungbure Pass, Thang La, Kam-rong La, Ta-sang La, Lamsi Pass, Naptra La, Tamaker Pass, Shentsa Pass, Laptse-Nagri, Tsang La, Lam-Ling Pass, Pong-chen La, Dong-chen La, Sangmo La, Kyegong La, Tsug-chung La, Gya La, Urang La, Sharu La, Gulung La and Sepo La.

While speaking of the crossing of the passes, it may be mentioned that, except on the Thang La, during the entire journey with its many passes, no one suffered seriously. Even in the case of the Thang La, the conditions were exceptional. There was a feeling of nervousness in the Expedition over the uncertain negotiations with the Tibetans. The conditions of the pass itself are also most exacting. George had such an exhausting heart attack there that he almost fell from his horse. Our doctor administered large doses of digitalis and ammonia and, expressing anxiety for George's life, restored the blood circulation by massage. Lama Malonov also fell from his horse there and was found lying unconscious on the ground. Also, three more members of the caravan had serious attacks of "Soor," or mountain sickness, which is evident in headache, poor blood circulation, sickness, and general fatigue. In any case, such weakness, in a varying degree, is characteristic during the crossing of the mountain passes. On the passes bleeding often sets in, first from the nose and later from other less protected organs.

The same symptoms may also be seen with animals at altitudes of fifteen thousand feet. The caravan road through Kardong, Sasser, Karakorum, especially is covered with skeletons of all sorts of animals: horses, donkeys, mules, yaks, camels, and dogs. On the way we saw several weak animals, heavily bleeding, which had been left behind. Motionless and trembling, they awaited their end. Their death could not be averted. There would have been only one way to save them: to take them away from the altitude of seventeen or eighteen thousand feet, to an altitude of about seven or eight thousand, which was impossible. In our caravan we had cases of bleeding among the men and animals, but fortunately without any disastrous results. Probably the measures that we took each time before crossing a pass prevented this.

Inexperienced travelers may think that before climbing difficult heights, it is advisable to fortify the body with meat, brandy, and smoke. But these three are the greatest enemies. Our experienced Ladakh guides firmly warned us that in crossing the passes, hunger was most beneficial to men and animals, and that nothing stimulating should be taken. At each pass, we always started out before dawn, drinking but a small cup of hot tea. The horses also were given no food. The lama who was with us bled several times, but the septuagenarian Chinese interpreter never had any trouble when crossing passes. Of course every superfluous movement or increased work caused weakness, giddiness and, with some people, even nausea, but a few minutes' rest restores the circulation of the blood.

We also suffered so-called mountain-blindness. Three of us had it in varying degrees—the Kalmuck, Khedub; the Tibetan, Konchok; and myself. This unpleasant trouble lasted five or six days. In my case, the right eye was affected and after two days I saw everything double, but quite clearly and distinctly. Khedub and Konchok saw everything even four times. We verified this with accuracy and repeatedly obtained the same results.

Equally unpleasant, especially for Mrs. Roerich, was the so-called hot snow, when the snow, reflecting the sun's rays, emits an intolerable heat, from which it is impossible to find escape.

We had three other unfortunate occurrences in the caravan: attacks of heart failure, which carried away three people, and inflammation of the lungs, of which two more died. Several people in our caravan also suffered from scurvy, among them one European, the chief of our transport. It must be mentioned that in Northern Tibet we met with many severe cases of scurvy.

In addition to the main core of the Expedition, consisting of Mrs. Roerich, our son George, and myself, besides the caravaneers and servants, from time to time during our long travels we had several collaborators. During our Sikkim journey, we were accompanied by our second son, Sviatoslav and Lama Lobzang Mingyur Dorje, the well-known scholar of Tibetan literature and teacher of most of the European Tibetologists. Every traveler in Sikkim is met with a

cordial reception by the general of the Tibetan army, Laden-La, now in the British service, who in every way assists travelers. During our further passage, as Chinese interpreter, the septuagenarian officer of the Chinese Army, Tsai Hanchen, as well as a Kalmuck lama Lobzang, went with us. On the Altai mountains we met S. G. and M. M. Lichtmann. After Urga, the expedition was augmented by Dr. Riabinin, by the chief of our transport, Porten, and by two sisters, unusual helpers of Mrs. Roerich, Ludmila and Raya Bogdanova, local Cossack girls of whom the younger one, Raya, was only thirteen years old at the time they joined the expedition. I believe she was the youngest non-Tibetan that has ever crossed the severe uplands of Tibet. The presence of three women, who shared all the dangers of the terrible frosts and hardships of the way, must be definitely stressed. In Sharagolchi before Ulan-Davan, two members were added—Colonel K. and G. in charge of expedition supplies.

Let us begin with Sikkim:

This blessed country, full of reminiscences of the illumined leaders of religions, leaves an impression of great calmness. Here lived Padma Sambhava, the founder of the Red Cap sect. Atisha, who proclaimed the teaching of Kalachakra, crossed this country on his way to Tibet. Here, in the caves, dwelt many ascetics, filling space with their powerful thoughts.

Behind Kanchenjunga, in subterranean caves, still live hermits, and only a trembling hand, stretched out for food in answer to a pre-arranged knock, indicates that the physical body is still alive. All seventeen peaks of the Himalayas shine above Sikkim. From West to East, they are Kang Peak, Jannu, Little Khabru, Khabru, Dom Peak, Talung Peak, Talung saddle, Kanchenjunga, Pandim, Jubonu, Simvoo, Narsing, Siniolchu, Pakichu, Chomiomo, Lama Andem, Kanchenjhou.

It is a whole snowy realm, altering its outlines with every variation of light! Verily it is inexhaustible in impressions and unceasingly evocative.

Nowhere else on earth are expressed two such entirely different worlds. Here is the earthly world, with its rich vegetation, brilliant butterflies, pheasants, leopards, panthers, monkeys, snakes, and the innumerable other animals that inhabit the ever-green jungles of Sikkim. And above the clouds, in unexpected heights, shines the snowy kingdom, which has nothing in common with the busy ant-hill of the jungles. It is an eternally moving ocean of clouds, with untold varieties of mist.

Kanchenjunga has attracted the attention equally of Tibetans and Indians. Here was created the inspiring myth about Shiva, who drank the poison of the world for the sake of humanity. Here, from the churning of the clouds, rose the brilliant Lakshmi, for the joy of the world.

In general, a beneficent atmosphere is also maintained in the monasteries of Sikkim. On every hill, on every summit, as far as the eye can reach, white points

can be seen—these are all strongholds of the teaching of Padma Sambhava, the official religion of Sikkim. The Maharajah of Sikkim, who lives in Gangtok, is deeply religious. The Maharani, his wife, is of Tibetan descent, and her education is quite exceptional compared to the usual Tibetan.

All monasteries of Sikkim are associated with some relics and ancient traditions. Here lived Padma Sambhava himself. Here the Teacher meditated upon a rock. When this rock splits anew, it means that the life of this place has diverted from the path of righteousness.

The Pemayangtse monastery is the official center of religion in Sikkim. Near the monastery are still seen ruins of the ancient palace of former Maharajahs. But far greater spiritual importance is attached to the old monastery Tashi-ding, which is one day's march away from Pemayangtse. Every traveler should visit this remarkable place, despite the difficult path by a bamboo bridge over a wild torrent.

We were in Tashi-ding in February, at the time of the Tibetan New Year, when thousands of visitors from the neighboring villages lend an exceptional picturesque quality to the ancient place. At that season in Tashi-ding is also performed the annual miracle of the Chalice. Every year an ancient stone chalice is half filled with water and sealed in the presence of the lamas and representatives of the Maharajah. The following year, also on New Year's Day, the casket in which the chalice is kept is unsealed. The old silk in which the chalice is wrapped is removed and, according to the amount of water remaining in the chalice, the future is predicted. The water either decreases, or, as is told, sometimes increases. Thus it was said to have considerably increased in 1914, before the Great War, and such increase always means calamity and war.

In all monasteries of Sikkim you can feel a friendly attitude toward foreigners and the hospitable atmosphere is undisturbed. The head lamas readily show you their treasures, among which are many old objects of fine workmanship.

We were in Sikkim at the time of the third ill-fated Everest Expedition, and the lamas told us: "We wonder why the pelings—foreigners—take such trouble in climbing. They will not be successful. Many of our lamas have been on the top of Mount Everest, but they were there in their astral bodies."

In these places many things seemingly strange to the European appear quite natural. Recently in Darjeeling, a strange episode took place with an old lama. During a disorder in the street, the lama, a casual spectator, was arrested by the police together with the guilty agitators of the disorder. The lama did not protest and together with all the others was sentenced to a certain term of imprisonment. When the term was over and the lama was to be released, he asked permission to remain in prison, because it was quiet and most suitable for concentration!

Sikkim also provided us with wonderful, beneficent legends. In the temple,

for instance, while the gigantic trumpets roared, the lama asked:

“Do you know why the trumpets of our temples have so resonant a tone?”

Then he explained: “The ruler of Tibet decided to summon from India, from the places where dwelt the Blessed One, a learned lama, in order to purify the fundamentals of the teaching. How to meet the guest? The High Lama of Tibet, inspired by a vision, gave the design of a new trumpet so that the guest should be received with unprecedented sound; and the meeting was a wonderful one—not by the wealth of gold but by the grandeur of sound!” . . .

“And do you know why the gongs in the temple ring out with such great volume? With silver clarity resound the gongs and bells at dawn and evening, when the higher currents are tense. Their sound reminds one of the beautiful legend of the Chinese emperor and the great lama: In order to test the knowledge and clairvoyance of the lama, the emperor made him a seat out of sacred books, and covering them with fabrics, invited the guest to sit down. The Lama said certain prayers and then sat down.

“The emperor demanded of him: ‘If your knowledge is so universal, how could you sit down on the sacred books?’

“‘There are no sacred volumes,’ answered the lama. And the astonished emperor, instead of his sacred volumes, found only empty paper.

“The emperor thereupon gave to the lama many gifts and bells of liquid chime. But the lama ordered them to be thrown into the river, saying: ‘I will not be able to carry these. If they are necessary to me, the river will bring these gifts to my monastery.’

“And indeed the waters carried to him the bells, with their crystal chimes, clear as the waters of the river.”

About talismans, the lama also explained:

“Talismans are regarded as sacred. A mother many times asked her son to bring her a sacred relic of Buddha. But the youth forgot her request. A half-day’s journey from his house, he recalled his mother’s request. But where can one find sacred objects in the desert? There is nought. But the traveler espied the skull of a dog. He decided to take out a tooth and, folding it in yellow silk, he brought it to the house.

“The old woman asked of him: ‘Have you again forgotten my last request, my son?’ He then gave her the dog’s tooth wrapped in silk, saying: ‘This is the tooth of Buddha.’

“And the mother put the tooth into her shrine, and performed before it the most sacred rites, directing all her worship to her holy-of-holies. And the miracle was accomplished. The tooth began to glow with a pure ray and many miracles and sacred objects resulted from it.”

Even briefly I cannot refrain from mentioning evidences of will power, which occur in these places. During the visit of the Tashi Lama to India, he was asked

whether it was true that he had some special psychic powers. The spiritual leader of Tibet smiled, and did not reply. But within a few minutes the Tashi Lama disappeared. All present began to search for the Tashi Lama, but in vain. Then a newcomer entered the garden where this had occurred and was surprised at the unusual sight: the Tashi Lama was sitting quietly under a tree and round him, anxiously and in vain, many people were searching for him!

Or another case of will power: In the train of the Bengal railway was found a Sadhu without a ticket. He was put off the train at the next station. The Sadhu sat on the platform, not far from the engine and remained motionless. The signal was given for the train to leave but the train did not move. The passengers, already displeased at the treatment accorded the Sadhu, paid special attention to this fact. The signal was given again—and again the train did not move. Then the passengers demanded that the Sadhu be brought back. The holy man was solemnly reinstated on his seat, and then the train was sent on safely.



I will not pause to speak of Benares, or its Sanskrit pandits, or the sacred ceremonies on the Ganges. Let us not be surprised that a great part of Sarnath, the memorial site where Buddha began his sermons, is, below the surface, still unexplored. Even those ruins, which one may now see, have also been excavated only recently. A strange fate follows most of the places connected with the personal activity of the great founder of Buddhism. Kapilavastu and Kushinagara, the places of birth and death of the Lord Buddha, are in ruins; Sarnath is not yet completely excavated. There is some special significance in this fact. Until recently, several scientists tried to prove that Gautama Buddha never existed.

In spite of the facts in the voluminous Buddhist literature, in spite of the inscriptions on the ancient columns of King Ashoka, the French scientist Senart, in his book, has tried to prove that Buddha never existed and was nothing more than a solar myth. But here, also, our exact knowledge has provided the evidence of the human existence of Gautama Buddha. For soon after, there was excavated in Piprava, in Nepalese Terai, the urn, dated with an inscription, containing the ashes and bones of Lord Buddha. A similar historical casket, with part of the relics of the Teacher, buried by King Kanishka, was found near Peshawar and also testifies definitely to the existence of the Great Teacher. It is curious to note that the last discovery was made in accordance with chronicles of old Chinese writers noted for the accuracy of their narratives. We had occasion to convince ourselves more than once of this.